

YOUTH RIDES WEST



by

WILL
IRWIN

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YOUTH RIDES WEST

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A STORY OF THE SEVENTIES

BY

WILL IRWIN



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To Edith Greene Irwin

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CHAPTER I

THE ROAD TO FORTUNE

“**D**ROP and crawl,” whispered Buck Hayden; and when he turned, I saw that his complexion had turned from mahogany tan to a bronzed yellow—“and don’t show yourself out of kiver.”

But for a wrong turn that morning, Buck would not have flown this first symptom of anything like craven emotion that I ever witnessed in him; and the story I have set myself to tell might never have happened. I say this last without being exactly sure. As I review in my age that episode which crowned and finished my youth, I have a feeling that an iron thread of destiny ran through it all. Had it not begun dramatically, there on the hogback above Ludlow Gulch, it would have begun just the same—perhaps undramatically, but just as certainly—at some other turning in the path of my fate.

Buck, when we threw our outfit and fortunes together down at Plested’s, had boasted that he knew these mountains about as well as anyone. This may have been true; but in those days of the rush to the far, high camps, I think that no one, not even the trappers, had gone much beyond the outskirts of ignorance. There was simply too much to know. It was like having acquaintance with every soul in New York. A road, such as it was, ran from Plested’s to the new camp of Cottonwood—more than a hundred perpendicular miles to accomplish a distance which the eagle covers in fifty. On the first day of our journeying, we had followed that highway. It proved less a road than a bog. Two hours out of Plested’s, we found it necessary to unload our feeblest burro because he could not both pull his slender feet out of the clinging mud below, and

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struggle with the haystack which was Buck's idea of a proper pack. All that morning, our more agile outfit was threading the edge of the road to pass immigrant wagons stalled hub-deep in the mire. To the first of these—its male equipment consisted of three Missourians, its motive power of two big, brown mules—I offered assistance. I noticed that Buck did not at once join in the proceedings, but sat for a minute scowling down at my efforts to turn a rear wheel. After that, he joined in with such muscle, goodwill and science that a minute later the mules had jerked the wagon on to a dry patch of road. When we had left the thankful Missourians inspecting harness, and filed on, Buck turned in his saddle and remarked:

"Young tenderfoot, this here Eastern etiquette and manners is all right—in their place."

"But I was just trying to be neighbourly," I said.

"What are they doin', them Missourians?" asked Buck. "Stampedin' to the Cottonwood country just like you and me. If they're damn-fool enough to try it in a prairie schooner and git stuck, it's all in the game, ain't it? Suppose you help 'em out an' they beat you to the diggin's and stake the claim you was goin' to stake an' make a million? Well, then!"

Silent under this merited rebuke, I rode on at the rear of our train, ignoring a double freight wagon with a six-mule team stuck as tight as the emigrant wagon, a stalled freighter who hailed us with piteous calls for help, a struggling buckboard with a load of household freight. Our slower and lighter equipment seemed to be passing even the unstalled wagons—at least a dozen of them, all told. Breaking a silence of two hours, Buck remarked:

"Hell of a crowd!" The humour of which did not strike me for half an hour; town-bred though I was, I too was growing so accustomed to solitudes that I regarded a dozen rigs on one road as a considerable gathering of humanity.

The light buckboard, extricated from the mud, presently caught up with us, passed us; we seemed to be distancing the rest. Then, toward noon, we struck an obstacle which equalized the race. Our way had fallen in with the course of a

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tumbling, roaring, fast-falling creek, in whose pools I could see the native mountain trout jumping. The road began to climb; we were threading the edge of a low cliff above a little cañon. We rounded a corner of rock, and Buck pulled up short at the very tailboard of a ponderous open freight-wagon carrying a heavy load of winches and mine buckets.

"What's busted ahead?" Buck called.

"Cave-in—hitch and help!" came between puffs of laboured breath from the seat of the freight-wagon. When I had dismounted and crawled perilously along the foot-wide strip of rock between the giddy atmosphere and the ponderous wagon-wheel, I saw that a ton of rock and oozy earth, dislodged by one of the miniature brooks now running from the melting snows, lay piled along the road. Five years before, during one of the abortive rushes to a camp now dead, gone and forgotten, this section of roadway had been blasted from the hill-side at the top of the cliff; on one side was a sheer drop, on the other an eight-foot wall. We could not round the obstacle on either side; the only alternative to waiting was to go back half a mile, try to traverse the hill-side, and chance getting mired.

While I contemplated this quandary, exit was barred in that direction by the jaunty arrival of a stage-coach. Cottonwood was now reaching such importance that a regular line with daily departures ran from Plested's. It rounded the corner, the driver expertly pulling up his leaders a foot from where my bronco stood tethered at the rear of our train. Its door flew open, and it began to void the inside passengers—half a dozen men in heavy boots, brown overalls and blue shirts like the rest of us, and two whom I classified by my new Western instinct as dudes; forgetting that less than a year ago I was wearing just such black suits with heavy binding, just such low-crowned derby hats, just such tight-fitting, square-toed shoes. The nearest turned to help out two women; and at them I frankly stared, as did all the rest of our masculine, woman-hungry caravan. They wore sealskin coats, already spattered all round the edges with spots of mud; they wore black hats

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with sleazy ostrich plumes; as the foremost put out her hand to be helped down from the stage, I noticed that it was dressed in a skin-tight kid glove on which shone a huge diamond ring; and that when her coat flopped open as she stepped down, it revealed a flash of brocaded blue silk. If this costume did not betray to the most obtuse the social position of these ladies, their burst of raucous laughter when they realized our predicament brought revelation. Forthwith, the party established itself on a shelf of rock beside the road; the taller of the two dudes—he was distinguished by a long, silky moustache—produced from a pocket of his long overcoat a flask; they all drank, straight from the bottle.

My feet on the edge of the chasm, my hands against the wagon-wheel, I was contemplating this party, when Buck poked me in the side with such force as nearly to make me lose my balance.

“Unship them tools!” said Buck. “Gotto dig!” We crawled and slopped back to our pack-train, where Buck, expertly untying and knotting again, took out our two new miner’s shovels. We were turning back, when one of the dudes remarked, perfectly audibly:

“His whiskers, oh, his whiskers!” And through his pursed lips came a realistic imitation of the wind in the trees. The women giggled. I saw Buck turn, train his light-blue eyes on the group; the giggle died.

Buck behaved unaccountably. Deliberately, he laid down his shovel in the road; with the same deliberation, he began untying another pack, where we kept our pair of extra shovels. When we bought our outfit, Buck had been very particular about this matter. “Shovels is sometimes the hardest things to git in a new country,” he had said. “Bust one, and where are you?” Buck got them out, carefully retied the pack. Then, the tools in his left hand, his right carelessly dropped by his side, he slouched over to the group on the ledge of rock.

“You’re goin’ to dig,” he said in even a lower tone than was his wont.

The two dudes looked up. There stood Buck, at the moment

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extremely majestic what with his height, his flowing brown beard and his steady blue eye. Just over his hip, in easy reach of that drooping right hand, swung 45 calibres of the law in all altitudes above Denver. I am not so sure what the men might have done alone. My eye, drawn by nature's strongest force, was at the moment on the women. I saw that the older had suddenly turned pale—a pallor which brought out in patches the rouge of her cheek and chin. She was experienced of the West, evidently; just as evidently, she had been accustomed to meet situations involving guns. She laughed the same raucous laugh as before, but to my ears it seemed forced.

"Great!" she shrieked. "Make Billy dig! Go on—I want to see you work!" And she poked and pummelled the man with the silky moustache. The other woman seemed to have caught the cue. I saw her lean her rouged mouth toward the ear of her man, whisper something. They both laughed. So the dudes, their faces saved, rose; the one with the silky moustache remarking jauntily:

"All right, old hoss!"

Buck made no reply, but stood like a bearded angel of justice holding out the shovel. As they turned toward the stalled freight-wagon, he had the air of herding them ahead of him.

I had estimated that there were two tons of earth in the cave-in. When I, with Buck and his captives, fell to work, it looked more like ten. And presently, as we heaved the loose, mushy earth over into the cañon, we began scratching the surface of a rock which in itself must have weighed a ton. Long after a dozen hands had heaved over the last of the dirt, we were working on that inert obstacle. It resisted the efforts of a dozen strong backs and the three crowbars which we could commandeer from the freight-wagon, the stage and our pack. At one moment, Buck, the stage-driver and the freighter, experts all, were of the opinion that we should have to take to dynamite. But there stood the freight-wagon, unable to move either forward or back; which rendered blasting impossible. Buck ventured charily that a cradle might do. The stage-driver and I took axes from the freighter's tool-chest, cut and

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heaved down trunks and brush from the dwarf firs on the ledge above. That device finally worked. With stout, green poles reinforcing our crowbars, with everyone, even the two dudes, putting his back into the work, we managed to roll it to the edge of the cañon where, with a terrible but satisfying rush and roar, it dropped to the bed of the creek. By now Buck's two captives were in such a state that even they were laughing at themselves; and Buck's sinister expression had relaxed to a grin. They had rolled up the bottoms of their plaid trousers, revealing white socks and pink underwear; but now, fashionable square-cut shoes, trousers and intervening underwear were just boots of reddish-grey mud. Their white collars had wilted to wet rags. He of the long, silky moustache seemed to have forgotten what chagrin he may have felt over his encounter with Buck; the good humour which possesses men when they do things together was upon him.

"I guess I'd better get another outfit of clothes if I'm going to stick in this country," he said.

"I'd advise you to," said Buck, but not ill-humouredly. Everyone laughed, the dudes with the rest. A moment later, we heard the raucous shrieks of the women on the ledge as their men rejoined them.

But the episode was not entirely over. When the freighter laid his weight to the jerk-line and yelled "Gid-dap!" his scrambling, tugging mules, though urged with a seven-foot black-snake, could not budge the wagons. The wheels had been settling all this time. Hé was obliged to uncouple the trailer, to haul the leader a half-mile farther along the road, to return with his mules for the trailer.

While we waited, everyone had luncheon—Buck and I from camp bread and frizzled bacon put up before we broke camp that morning. We fed our horses their rations from our carefully calculated store of oats, had our smoke. The stage-driver extracted a big picnic hamper from the boot; the passengers, sitting on the dashboards or on that ledge of which the two women had taken possession, regaled themselves with sandwiches and cold coffee. From the caravan piling up on the

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road below, other men had surrounded this group; the women were holding a reception. I was disposed to join them, from curiosity if nothing else, but Buck made no move in that direction; and I out of loyalty forbore. Neither then nor at any subsequent time did Buck make any reference to the brush with the two dudes; but once he remarked on the stage itself.

"She's a run-down buggy from the Hardwick and Benson line up to Coronado," he said. "Can't be carryin' nothin' worth stealin' in the mail-bags. There's no messenger aboard."

"Do they hold up stages in these parts?" I asked.

"Often," said Buck.

By now, the six-mule team had hauled out the trailer, and we bitted, tightened cinches, mounted and stirred up our burros which had been standing patiently on three legs, asleep with their eyes open. Where the road widened, we turned into the mesa. The stage-coach, the driver's whip cracking briskly, surged round the stalled wagons and was gone smartly up the road. The two women waved from the windows as they passed us, and called:

"Good-bye, boys—come to see us when you get to camp!"

"After we've made our strike!" commented Buck, cynically. He of the silky moustache leaned from another window and said something which I did not catch—only the word "show." He cast out a card. It lit on a hummock, where I could reach it from the saddle. I picked it up and read it to Buck:

"CREIGHTON MYERS
MYERS-MENKEN VARIETY THEATRES."

"Variety!" snorted Buck. "I've been tryin' to figure those dudes. We better hurry along. When va-riety begins to hit a camp, it means they's more folks than claims."

I have said enough about the state of the Cottonwood road, and will only sketch the main trouble of the afternoon—that stretch of corduroy. Two miles or so after we left the freighter, we came to a piece of low country which might have been firm enough in midsummer, but was now a bog. The

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stage company had made it passable by cutting ten-foot poles and laying them edge to edge. That turned out to be practicable enough for the wide hoofs of our horses, but treacherous footing for the little feet of our burros. Sure of step though they were, the logs would roll under them now and then, and their legs would go scraping down into the morass. By the time we reached the end of this stretch, the little beasts were fairly staggering—less from the weight of their packs than from the heart-breaking labour of pulling out their hoofs, which cut into mud like bodkins. By now, too, they had reached the limit of endurance even for the patient ass-breed. Even though I was the junior of the partnership and had resigned all direction into the hands of the expert Buck, I was about to protest, when he spoke:

“Can’t kill our live stock,” he said. “Keep ’em goin’ till I ride ahead and look for a place to camp.”

He found it a mile or so farther along, a crease of the hill-side making a fertile valley all abloom with pale yellow buttercups and pink or purple anemones. What was more to our purpose, between the dwarf sage-brush grew clumps of bunch-grass, which tradition holds to be the most nourishing thing a granivorous animal can eat. A rocky knoll in the midst of this expanse seemed to offer a dry bed. So, though the declining sun as yet made shadows only on the slopes of the range, though there were still two or three hours of light ahead, we camped, unsaddled, unpacked, staked out our horses to graze, turned loose the weary jacks to roam and feed at will so long as daylight held and we could watch them from our perch. As we cut firewood, laid mattresses of brush, ate supper, finally caught and tethered the jacks to stake-lines, Buck was silent even for him. Only when we had disposed ourselves in our blankets did he grow communicative after his fashion, and draw me out on the subject of astronomy. I have always believed that one of the reasons why Buck threw in with me, an inexperienced Easterner with nothing to recommend him except the price of half an outfit, was the reverence of the unlearned for the learned. And he showed on the second

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day of our acquaintance an avid curiosity about the structure of this universe. It was bred, I doubt not, of his long years under those mountain stars, so much brighter and nearer than those of our misty sea-coast; stars that awe you and lift you. I was hard put to recall for his benefit my college astronomy. As we lay that night, we talked of Leo, now blinking down on us—we had exhausted long ago all I knew of Orion. I shaped for him the lion as the ancients used to see it, and tried to remember how many years it took the light of Regulus to reach our little planet. I think that I started in him meditations on the infinity of space which grew in time too oppressive; for suddenly he changed to mundane things.

"Mebbe we'd done better to buy a wagon outfit after all," he said. "We ain't gettin' much ahead of wagons this-a-way." He paused a moment. "Got a good notion to take a chance." He paused again.

"I'm willing," said I. At that stage of my life in the West, I was living for adventure. About our prospects of making a fortune in Cottonwood I was internally sceptical; whereas Buck, after twenty years of indifferent luck, took most seriously this rush for fortune.

"Thar's a Ute trail about two mile up," continued Buck, as though he only waited my permission. "Followed it once. Cuts off ten miles of this mush. Can't be in worse shape than this road."

"Then let's take it," said I.

"Guess I'll go to sleep now," said Buck. So with Aldebaran and Regulus and the Dog-star blinking down into my face like night lamps, I let the cry of a distant coyote, the whispering voices of the firs, sing me to sleep.

An hour after we swung into the plain, open entrance of the old Ute trail next morning, it became apparent to me that a little of the confidence with which Buck had started was wearing away. On the slopes and ridges we were traversing, the snow whose melting made a morass of the road lay in dirty white patches fringed with clusters of purple anemone. Buck, as usual, rode ahead while I urged on the jack-train

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from the rear. Now and then, he leaned over his horse's neck, his hands folded on the saddle-horn, peering uneasily downward or ahead. At this or that patch of snow, he held up his hand for a halt, dismounted and tried to trace the trail by the creases. Twice we went wrong; once trouble was signalled when the forequarters of Buck's horse disappeared under the crust, leaving his hind legs struggling and scratching grotesquely.

The leading burro, which I had already noted as a grizzled, pessimistic veteran of the trails inclined to trouble when trouble might vary the monotony of life, took a plunge forward; in turn his forequarters were lost. He lurched sidewise with a metallic clang as he rolled on to our cooking-outfit, Dutch oven and all. Buck was strangely silent as he swung from the saddle, jerked his horse backward on to a patch of the snow which covered some kind of firm footing, and set out with my help to extricate him. By now, that culprit lay quiet, philosophically waiting for humanity to extricate him from the quandary into which his own asininity had got him. Plainly even to me, this was not the trail; the canny Utes, who had followed this route to the summer hunting-grounds since long before our people signed Magna Charta, would never have run it over such an uncertain course of rocks.

Buck, as he reproved the delinquent burro with a heavy boot, heaved the pack back into place, and threw a new diamond hitch here and there, had a sinister gleam in his grey eye and worked in a strange silence, quite contrary to his usual profane habit in face of trouble. This was no time for me to grow critical; I held my tongue, though I was just young enough, just new enough from the East, to enjoy this little joke on an elder and a toughened Westerner. Buck leading silently, we turned back to the edge of the snow-field. After a long inspection of the surface, varied with squints at the sun, the atmosphere and the peaks above, Buck silently beckoned me to follow. We rounded a clump of dwarf pines perched on a little knoll—and came out in face of a cliff. The train halted automatically. I saw Buck cock his eye upward, then turn it

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on me; and I, abandoning the rear of the train, rode forward for a conference. Buck's head was wagging; and now I could hear his roll of low, complicated and picturesque language.

"No mortal sense in this," he concluded. "We'll waller here all day. Gotto strike West an' see if we kin connect with the damn, muddy Cottonwood road." His blue eye, as he faced me, hinted at what criticism might bring on a half-baked tender-foot. I did Buck the unwarranted credit of assuming that he was not going to make excuses; but as he struck out at right angles, he muttered:

"Ten good year sence I was over this trail anyway!"

Getting lost in this manner—with the whole day ahead of us, with an intact train of live stock, and with ample provisions in our packs—struck me at the moment as a minor and rather enjoyable adventure. Besides, there was the joke on Buck who, in our brief partnership, had been rather patronizing toward my youth and Easternness. I remember that as I turned the six burros and followed, I had one of those exalted moments which compensate youth for all its uncertainties and storms. This was a morning full of glory—warm for May among the peaks, still, and pure as only a mountain day can be pure. The perpetual white of the range above seemed dark and turbid beside the heavenly clear air and the diamond brilliance of the little glacial streams trickling from the snow-banks. There I was—young, breathing into untainted lungs the purest air above this world, my face set toward the dazzling adventure of a new mining-camp. Anything might happen, but whatever it was would be glorious. Two or three times afterward in my youth, I was to feel that same wraith of heavenly rapture; but after this time it became one of my superstitions that some great, perturbing change in my scheme of life was to follow; and I would put down the emotion, half born.

Our way to westward, after we crossed the patch of snow, revealed no trail, but a passable surface. Half a mile beyond rose a rather sharp hogback, dotted here and there with that species of dwarf fir which seems to choose rocks in preference

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to soil. I conjectured that Buck expected to reach the Cottonwood road below the further slope of this hogback, and would be perplexed to find a trail. I was not surprised, then, when he pulled up just short of the obstacle, threw himself out of the saddle, tossed the reins over his horse's head, and went forward on foot. Uninvited I dismounted, similarly deceived my roan bronco into believing that he was tied, and followed. Buck had halted near the crest of the hogback and I was close behind him, when I was stopped short by the sound of two shots—rifle-shots, I noted mentally as they reverberated like a diminishing volley among the rocks.

The sound did not strike me as especially significant; someone, I thought, was shooting at a deer. My concern was for my bronco, who might or might not be gun-shy. I turned to see that he was dancing and side-stepping but that the illusion of being tied held him to the spot. It was then that Buck whispered through his beard:

“Drop and crawl and don't show yourself out of kiver!”

CHAPTER II

ENTER LADIES

ACROSS a very uncomfortable carpet of rock, I wriggled to Buck's side. He lay peering from under a low-hung branch of dwarf fir. I ranged myself beside him, looked; and caught my breath.

The Cottonwood road lay just below us; for on the other side our hogback became a shelving cliff. Some seventy-five yards away stood a stage-coach, in build and colour twin to the one which we had seen yesterday. Three of its horses were struggling and milling, with the driver throwing all power on to the reins. The fourth, a little white leader, lay on his side, feebly kicking; as I looked, I saw a pool of blood by his head. I was aware of a man posed like a statue before the horses, his feet wide apart, a repeating rifle held at ready; I was aware that a black mask dropped from the lower edge of his sombrero.

Another man, he very tall, stood just by the edge of the road. His back was toward me, but I could see the band of a mask cutting his black hair. He was holding close in by his chest two heavy revolvers, trained upon an outside passenger who stood with his hands in air, balanced dizzily on a seat. Other details swam in upon me—the passengers coming out through the door, their hands up—two women among them—the bandit with the rifle exchanging that weapon for a revolver and stepping forward—finally, two other men, masked also, lying sprawled on a shelf of rock, their repeating rifles trained on the group about the stage.

I remember now with some pride that in my whirl of emotions—astonishment, righteous rage, pure fear—the manlier for a moment prevailed. We at least could fight! My

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hand went to my hip before I realized the futility of that. At seventy-five yards, shooting with a pistol would be random shooting; and my rifle was back there among the paraphernalia of our train. Buck had apparently seen the motion; for he whispered:

"No chance, kid. An' somethin' might hit the ladies."

The bandit whom I had noticed first, he who had just exchanged his rifle for a revolver, was saying something now to the man who stood balanced at the top of the stage—the express messenger, I learned afterward. Indeed, through the nervous mountain air the sound of his voice came all the way up to me. Though I could catch no words, it rang with a tone of command. The express messenger leaped from the seat to the ground and landed in a heap; as he scrambled to his feet, he showed a comic eagerness to get his hands up again. I could hear Buck chuckling lightly in his beard. Then he spoke in a whisper which scarcely carried to me:

"We're all right if they don't come out this-a-way."

"Why aren't we all right even then?" I asked, in my innocence.

"They don't want witnesses," replied Buck. "Shoot a witness quicker'n they would a passenger." He paused a moment. "Guess I'd better get them long guns," he whispered. "You stay an' watch—signal if they start this way." On any other errand, I am sure, Buck would have sent me. But this would involve unpacking, and Buck would never permit me to lay my inexpert hand on one knot of a pack. We had two long guns—that pride of our lives, a newfangled Winchester repeating rifle and a shotgun for small game. Providing against trouble, Buck had slipped in among our shotgun ammunition fifty shells loaded with buckshot.

Buck tiptoed away, his heavy boots making only a gentle rustling. I was free to fix my attention on the drama below. The two inactive bandits still lay like great, evil lizards across the rock, their rifles gently swinging over the field of action. I, from above, could see their figures as a whole. To the passengers they must have appeared simply as hats, black masks

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and polished steel barrels. He of the two pistols stood covering the line of passengers. He also was swinging his muzzles suggestively over the group. One thinks of queer things, notices queer things, at such moments as this. I had never seen a hold-up before, and I had imagined that when one got the command "Hands up!" he hoisted them far above his head, not realizing that it is impossible to maintain such a position for more than half a minute. These people—six or eight men and the two women—stood with palms held outward just over their breasts. At that, now and again one would seem too grow arm-weary; his hands would begin to droop; then one of those pistols would stop moving in its slow arc, and the hands would come up again as though jerked by a string. I grew weary with the deliberation of the bandits. Why did they not finish this business?

I looked for the fourth robber, the tall one who had stood at the edge of the road, and who appeared to be the leader. During my conference with Buck, he must have mounted the stage; for there he stood in the express messenger's seat. At that moment he was heaving over the rail a heavy box which half buried itself in the mud. With a lightness singular in one so big, he went over the rail in a leap, landed cat-like, rose and said something, it appeared, to the nearest passenger. This was a slouching little fellow, dressed roughly, like a miner.

I can still see his air of affected carelessness as he came forward. The leader, thrusting his pistol into its holster, began what seemed to me a rather superficial search. He patted the pockets of the little man, pulled out a wallet, opened it, took something from its contents; then, reaching under the coat of his victim, hauled his pistol from its holster and tossed it into the bushes. The same process with the next man—then there was a rustling behind me which made me jump and realize how tightly my nerves were strung. It was only Buck, creeping up silently with his hands full of long gun. When I looked back again, the turn of the two women had come. Hitherto they had stood in the background, half leaning against the stage. Now, at a word of command, I saw them step for-

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ward. They wore all-enveloping grey dust-coats, with veils tied over their hair. The foremost was plump and moved jerkily, as though struggling against fear. The other was slim; she stepped out with a free stride which I found myself admiring. A hot indignation possessed me; involuntarily I lifted the muzzle of my shotgun; then, realizing that I had a weapon which would not carry so far and which would kill friend and foe if it did, lowered it again.

A sudden movement from the right caught my sharpened attention; the nearest of those two evil lizards sprawled on the rock had started, raised himself on his elbows, let the muzzle of his long gun droop. Then I saw the other bandit give him a kick, sidewise, of his heavy boot. The careless robber jerked to attention. A grunt from Buck drew my eyes back from this bit of by-play. The bandit chief had laid hands on the younger woman, was awkwardly jerking her dust-coat apart at the throat. I felt another spurt of hot rage and—down the road, a rifle had fired twice in succession. I jumped so that had the bandits been looking our way, I am sure I should have betrayed myself. For a moment the group about the stage-coach was as still as a photograph. Then the leader, dropping his hands from the shoulders of the younger woman, bawled a word which carried even to me:

“Vamoose!”

At that, the two lizards on the rock became men again. Holding their rifles at ready, they leaped down into the road.

“Somebody’s coming and they’re going,” whispered Buck. Whatever fears had been shooting through my emotions in that tense few minutes seemed to have evaporated now; I found myself hot for action. One of the men from the rock, his muzzle still on the huddled crowd of passengers, stooped and picked up the rifle which the leader had dropped in the road. It had a strap, like an army gun. He slung it over his shoulder. The leader and his assistant, slipping their pistols into their scabbards, grasped the handles of the box.

“Now we’ll know,” muttered Buck. “If it’s this way, don’t shoot until I say!” But the robbers turned in the other direc-

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tion. Beyond and below the road, the hill dropped abruptly in a growth of dwarf pine which became willow as it approached the bed of a little creek. Into this thicket the robbers plunged.

Had Buck provided me with our rifle instead of handing me, with his characteristic canniness, our shotgun, I do not know what I might have done at the instant when the two leaders turned away. I was young; and I rather fancied my own shooting. Four shots at point-blank range—and it was done. But in the interval between the first shot and the last, the surviving bandits would have inferred that the fire came from among the passengers; until they died they would have pumped lead into that helpless, huddled group. Yet for a moment my cheeks tingled with shame that I had watched and done nothing. Then I heard Buck mutter:

“Lookee there—down by the creek!”

I saw a disturbance of the leaves among the willows. Into a space between patches of the green pattern I saw a horse swing round, sidewise and backward, as an independent steed will when he is about to be mounted. His flanks appeared first; then his side. He was a rangy, lean, American horse of that yellow shade which we called buckskin in the West in those days; but on his nigh flank, as he exposed it to my view, the full flash of the sun brought out a lighter patch as though he were turning white; a patch which, with my sharpened observation, I compared mentally to the top of a pear or the back view of the head and shoulders of a veiled woman. A second later, I saw his rider mount—booted, in inconspicuous dark clothes, still wearing a mask. The bandits were all dressed so much alike that, except for the big fellow, they had to me no separate identity. A moment of this, and his figure lost itself in the willow-thicket, which was agitated all about as by the passage of many horses; I caught, through another space of the leaves, a glimpse of a bay flank and of a rider's leg. The thicket quivered no more; they were gone.

“Keep on layin' close a minute,” said Buck. Now, he no longer whispered, but spoke aloud. “They kin see us just as

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we kin see them." He chuckled in his beard. "Hid their horses from the stage people. Hard to mask a horse!"

"Well, even if we didn't shoot——" I began, throwing forward my uneasiness of conscience.

"An' what was the use of shootin'?—only git the woman killed," interrupted Buck.

"Even if we didn't shoot, we've got a little evidence," I pursued.

"Kid Tenderfoot," replied Buck impressively, "what you don't know in this man's country don't hurt you none."

"What do you mean?" I asked, my Eastern sense of law and order not a little shocked.

"I mean," replied Buck, "that we don't know nothin' yet about the lay of this country, or what's goin' to git you in an' out of trouble." He chuckled again in his beard, and grew almost garrulous. "Darn slick job. Did you notice how smooth they got away? If anybody up here had been disposed or inclined to do any shootin', they was only a second when you could 'a' got all four of 'em. I wonder," he mused, "jest what the rear look-out was signallin' fur." His question was answered at that instant, when a mule-team drawing an emigrant wagon hove into sight below us. Behind this outfit trailed a spotted cow, on whose back rode a ten-year-old boy. The driver, of whom from our perch we could see only a wide, black hat, pulled up.

"Skeered off by a family outfit of nesters," remarked Buck. "Wish't they could 'a' known the joke on 'em! Well, guess we'd better be gettin' back to the jacks."

"I'm going down there," I said. Curiosity, perhaps something stronger, was drawing me. Buck rolled over, and regarded me full in the face.

"If anybody asks you questions, you didn't see nothin' but the tail end of this little circus," he said. "An' especially you saw no horses. What'd they do anyway but git a roll or a watch or two from those first passengers they stuck up?"

"They got the express strong-box," said I.

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"Yes, and who owned what was in it? Some money devil or other in Wall Street," replied Buck.

"All right," I replied, perhaps assuming more reluctance than I felt. Really, I was a little relieved not to have to admit that we had witnessed this episode without opening fire. Buck, remarking, "You go ahead. I want to pack these irons," took the two long guns and turned back to the train. I rose up then, and began scrambling toward the road down the face of the hogback. I had not descended ten feet before some impulse of caution moved me to call "Hello!" and to stand a moment with both hands raised. The passengers, the driver and the express messenger, grouped round the head of the stage, jumped nervously, turned and, perceiving my pacific attitude, continued their discussion. As I came down among them, the little, bearded man whom I had seen relieved of his wallet was remarking to the express messenger:

"You're a fine guard, you are—let your stage git held up in broad daylight and you with a sawed-off shotgun over your knees——"

"I was robbed too, wasn't I?" put in a larger man with a drooping sea-lion moustache. "And I say, he done right. One shot an' the leader's down, and this here messenger is lookin' into four sets of hardware. Suppose he had 'a' shot—how many of us would 'a' got it—huh?"

"That's right," came in half a dozen voices. Plainly, the general sentiment ran against shooting, and my pride of courage rested easier. I looked about me, then, for the women. She whom I recognized as the elder sat inside the stage, fanning herself with the edge of a newspaper. She was middle-aged, and a little more. She had a set of plump, high-coloured features under a row of grey-brown frizzes—a face which might have been habitually good-natured, I thought, but which was now set in an air of faint disgust with this annoyance and delay. I forebore to speak to her; she did not seem receptive.

Glancing round, I remembered that I had overlooked the one

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real tragedy of this affair—the nigh white leader. At some time in these proceedings he had let his head settle into the dust for the last time, and died. The driver was burrowing round the carcass, unbuckling straps; the three other horses were trembling at intervals with that strange perturbation which the smell of blood raises in hooved animals.

And by his head stood the other woman, her eyes on his wounded head. Drawn by I knew not what impulse, I approached her; she looked up across the dead horse, looked me full in the eye. Her face was so full of pity and tenderness that I could feel the tears starting behind my own eyes; and as though some stronger clairvoyance had in this instant opened her mind to mine, I knew what she felt—I had felt it so often myself. We humans who dared the old West acted reasonably and of our own will. To me, the sentimental tragedy lay not in what happened to men, but in the fate of these unasking brutes whose carcasses I had seen stiffening and rotting all along this road of adventure.

That expression of tenderness which held me speechless changed and merged into a little flicker of wonder. Then I saw that she was indeed young—and beautiful. When finally she dropped her gaze from mine and spoke, her accent was of the East. There was between the words a kind of delicious halting—like the pause, I thought, between drops of honey.

“You aren’t—you weren’t one of the passengers?”

“No,” I said. “But I saw the end of it. I didn’t shoot,” I added hastily. “It wouldn’t have been any use.” In excusing myself, I was accusing myself. But she reassured me; and, I felt, with genuine feeling.

“I’m glad you didn’t,” she said. “I’m glad I don’t have to see a man this way—” she glanced down at the dead horse, “even a bandit.” She stood musing a moment. I had time to notice a firm chin, a mouth just a trifle too wide for our standards of beauty in those days—like my mother’s, I noted mentally—but pink and gently bowed, a fine-drawn, pointed nose, dark-blue eyes. What else there was of beauty lay concealed

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beneath her enveloping duster and the veil which covered hat and hair.

"Crime is always cruel," she said. "I—I never thought of that before. This—this is my first sight of it." She seemed now to pull herself out of this mood; and she looked me over with her engaging glance of frankness. I had shaved when we broke camp that morning, causing Buck to grunt that I was a lot of trouble to myself; otherwise, I was in the costume of the place and times, plus a caking and spattering of mud.

"You're from the East, too," she remarked.

"How did you know?" said I.

"I didn't mean to be impertinent," she answered, smiling, "but it's your accent."

"Acquired at Harvard and most difficult to alter into the forceful and manly tones of the West," said I. She laughed at that, though lightly; and I liked her laugh. It ran a gamut, played a little tune. "Harvard!" she said, and her slurring of the *r*'s reminded me again that she too was an Easterner. I felt she was about to say more, and then thought better of it and pulled herself up short.

"And at present," I went on, "I'm bound for Cottonwood too; only instead of travelling in the effete luxury of a stage, I'm driving a jack-train."

"I don't know how else a lone woman is to travel," she replied. "It's just as well those bandits didn't rob me——" She stopped, as though feeling she had said too much.

"Oh, they didn't get round to you, then?" I inquired; and cursed myself for my hypocrisy. Somehow, I felt averse in that moment to lying.

"No," she said, "though I think they were going to when that shot stopped them. One of them had opened my coat. I belong to the sex which is allowed to boast of its courage. I think I wasn't a bit frightened, only interested and then indignant, until that—that rascal—laid his hands on me. Even then, it was the kind of fear you have of a snake."

"And the lady inside there—your——" I began.

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"Oh, she's just another passenger," she replied to my unformed question. "I'm travelling to Cottonwood alone. She took it all beautifully."

"I'm going up to stake a claim and take my chances," I said, leaving it delicately open for her to state my curiosity if she wished. Apparently she saw the point, and parried.

"I'm going up—on business," she replied. "See—they're about to dispose of the poor horse!" For the driver had finished his unbuckling, had summoned help from the passengers about the doors of the stage-coach. Together they hauled the mortal remains of the dead beast to the edge of the road, let it go rolling down over the face of a boulder. I did not help, but stood outside with the lady; and like a congregation at a funeral, we were silent until the last flop of the inert body signified that all was over. Just then Buck joined us, asking innocently what the difficulty might be. The passengers surrounded him, babbled out their separate stories, Buck breaking in now and then with a bland "Well, well!" or "You don't say!"

"Didn't notice which way they went?" inquired Buck on the first pause.

"That's what I've been saying," declared the little man who had been robbed. "Trail's hot now. By the time the sheriff gets started, it'll be dead cold. If we was half a set of men, we'd be formin' a posse right now an' chasin' 'em."

"And us without a saddle in the outfit," interposed the express messenger coldly, logically.

"Well, a great, grand line this is!" said the injured passenger. "Payin' a hundred dollars to git robbed. Took three hundred dollars in bills off me, an' if I hadn't 'a' hid——"

"We've heard that before," said the express messenger.

It looked for a second like trouble; doubtless it would have been trouble, but for Buck.

"I'm goin' to follow a ways on foot," he said. "Anybody goin' along?" I had to suppress a smile at my crafty partner. He and I alone knew that the bandits had got clear away. The uninjured passenger, his bluff called, said rather weakly, I

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thought: "That's the ticket." The express messenger threw his sawed-off shotgun over his arm; they two plunged into the thicket and the rest of the passengers, after a second of hesitation, followed. I saw that, with the eye of beauty on me, I must not hold back.

"Wait a minute," I called; "I am going along." At that, the unknown woman put out her hand so that she almost touched my elbow, drew it in with a little flush of confusion, and——

"Oh, you won't do anything rash!" she faltered.

"There's no danger—they must have gone!" I replied with exact truth and yet with hypocrisy. As I waded through the mud past the coach, I looked up; the middle-aged woman was regarding me from under her frizzes.

"Well, it's time!" she remarked grimly.

I came upon our company following in open order the footprints of the four bandits. Buck, with assumed valour, was leading; he peered behind the willow-bushes, he slid swiftly, crouching, over the open spaces; he gave altogether a beautiful impersonation of Old Scout on the trail. So he followed the footprints into the thick willows to a wet terrain now mushy with the trampling of horses.

"Here's where they hitched!" he said. Then Buck gracefully yielded to the little man, who turned out to be a tracker. Holding us all back, he dropped on one knee and meticulously examined the signs.

"Four hosses," he declared, "all American hosses except maybe one. An' that hoof's too fine for a bronc. He's shod only behind, and a little lame in the nigh shoulder. But he steps like speed." He looked again, long and intently. "One's a bay," he said, "and one must be grey roan." Having finished this expert inspection, he plunged after the hoof-trails into the bushes, the rest following respectfully.

"They carried the express box between two of 'em on their hosses," he announced at length. "Couldn't go very fur that way." He turned and faced us with a sinister and apprehensive eye. The dullest, I suppose, caught the point. If the

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bandits, handicapped with that heavy box, could not travel fast, they might be waiting for us in ambush. Here the assumed courage with which Buck started turned into real valour.

"Well, what did we go in here fur?" he jerked out; forthwith he took the lead, bending now and then to inspect the trail. I found myself hanging back. At any moment those rustling leaves above, those rippling waters below, all the morning music of spring in the high mountains, might be shattered by a rattle of shots and we—then I steadied myself and, with a kind of sense of doing penance for my momentary weakness, worked toward the head of the straggling column. The trail led into the stream. We stepped over to the opposite bank. No new tracks broke its mud and mosses except the clean, incised hoof-prints of two deer.

"Follow the creek," said Buck. "Must 'a' turned up-stream, because down-stream she runs for a mile or two beside the road." So, part of us trying to cling to the banks and the rest frankly wading or stumbling over the rocks, we went forward. For a quarter of a mile we floundered and stumbled. Already faint protests were rising from the rear over the futility of the whole proceeding, when Buck came to a turn of the creek and peered round a clump of willows growing close to the curve of the bank. He crouched, held up his hand. I could hear all noise of trampling and splashing stop behind us; and I drew my revolver. He may have stayed so for a quarter of a minute; it seemed hours. Then Buck raised his hand again, and beckoned us on. I shot up beside him; he pointed. Half sunken in the creek lay the big iron box, open. We all plunged forward.

"Thar's yer express safe," said Buck.

The messenger bent down and examined it. A cold-chisel, quite evidently, had been edged into the crack between box and lid, and the inadequate lock had been severed by a few smashing blows.

"Damn pity," said the injured passenger, "that this here alleged stage company don't use a cracker box for its valuables. Damn sight better than——" His voice died away

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into inarticulate grumbings. But the express messenger was running over the envelopes which strewed the bottom of the box. He turned toward us, and he was pale under his tan.

"They took the money," he said. "That's gone."

"How much?" asked Buck.

"I ain't supposed to know," said the express messenger, "but twenty thousand if anybody asks you."

"Where's the mail-sack?" someone inquired. As we spread out in a straggling line of searchers, the express messenger still squatted by the box, staring blankly into its depths. But suddenly he looked up, and said:

"Didn't take the mail-sack."

Buck whistled.

"Ain't no raw beginners, these here bandits," he remarked. "Know that if they rob the mail, they're in trouble with Uncle Sam."

Our tracker established that here the bandits had left the creek, had turned abruptly westward into an old trail which broke through the willows, vanished between a border of dwarf firs.

"There was a buckskin hoss in the outfit too," he pronounced, "and they were sure ridin' when they went."

Unmounted as we were, we gave up the pursuit. As we turned back, the express messenger and I picked up the box by its handles and carried it between us. I assumed this task deliberately; and I refused all offers to spell me until we had finished the passage of the creek. Then I let the outraged passenger have my handle, and pressed up the slope ahead of the rest.

By now, two more wagon-outfits had piled up back of the stage. I saw that the driver was hitching a little, bay bronco into the place of the dead leader. I learned afterwards that he was the spare horse of a wagon-outfit, leased on the spot at a ruinous rate. My unknown lady was leaning against her shelf of rock, surrounded by four men. The expression of their backs and profiles indicated gallantry. The passengers, in this crisis, had not spared any time to pay the tribute held due

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in the old West to beauty and innocence; but the wagon-outfits had more leisure. I caught her face; she was smiling, but with all her feminine reserves up. However, as I came into the road she saw me; and I felt that her deep-blue eyes had for just an instant flattered me with personal concern, that momentarily she had stepped out from her entrenchments.

"What did you find?" she asked as I approached the group. So not to her but to the company, I told the story of our little adventure. I had not finished when the stage-driver yelled "All aboard!" The wagon-men departed to their outfits; by now, I found, they had all told the lady their names, their business and even details of their family life; the air was full of assurances that if she wanted any assistance in Cottonwood, they were hers to command. I was alone with her now, but only for the brief passage from the rock to the stage-coach door.

"My name is Gilson, Robert Gilson," I said, and found that I had to raise a little nerve to make that simple advance.

"That's a good old New England name," she remarked.

"Second Cliff, Scituate, in 1633," said I; then felt my cheeks tingling with the ghost of shame; it seemed like boasting, that. She was gathering her duster about her; she was starting; but I said no more lest she change the subject. Doubtless she saw the point in my pause.

"Mine is Deane—Mrs. Deane," she replied; and we stepped to the stage-coach.

Then, as I closed the door and she settled down lightly in her seat, she said without hint or prompting from me: "I shall be boarding with Mrs. Barnaby here," and a wave of her gloved hand indicated the woman to her right, her of the ruddy countenance and the frizzes.

"You will," put in that lady grimly, "if ever that freight company gets my outfit into camp. The way this stage line is run, I must say the chances is promisin'. I must say——" The coach jerked away, but her conversation buzzed monotonously through the creaking of the leather boot, the rattle of the wheels.

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She, the young unknown—she had given me a subtle, half-expressed invitation. The glow about my heart told me that I liked that, just as I did not like her “Mrs.”

Buck spoke; I found that my eyes were still on the retreating coach.

“One dum thing after another,” he said. “If it ain’t a cave-in, it’s robbers. Won’t be a four-foot patch of pay dirt left by the time we strike camp. Well, anyhow, stage-drivers is sometimes some use. This here one put me right about that trail.” Forthwith, we clambered over the rocks to the mesa where our burros, which Buck had cannily staked out before he rejoined me, grazed at the extreme end of their lines.

CHAPTER III

MUD AND GLORY

THE stage-driver's directions for finding and following the old Ute trail proved accurate enough, so that Buck did not lose his way again; yet we won after all only a doubtful advantage. During these the roaring seventies, maps of the Rockies existed only in the memory of such as Buck. When I started, I knew vaguely that Cottonwood lay in the valley of Hawthorne Creek some eight or nine thousand feet above sea-level, that it was guarded on the eastern side by the pinnacles of the Pyrite range, and that its only practicable approach ran over Ludlow's Pass, some eleven thousand feet up in the bright air. The deer and elk had found that notch in the mountains originally, the Utes had followed, and now we were following in turn. Trails, deer-paths and the new main road to the diggings all ran together, as into a funnel, at the pass.

The interruption of the stage robbery took most of our morning. By dusk we had advanced only ten weary miles; for now we were really climbing. While I unsaddled, cut down a dead pine for wood, built a fire on a course of rocks which thrust its crest above the snow, started supper, Buck went ahead in the dying light to reconnoitre. He returned in his native state of cynical pessimism. Only a mile ahead, the trail ran into the Cottonwood road. So far as he could see, it never left the road again and there wasn't the chance of a snowball in hell, Buck declared, of any further short cut. We should be in luck if we made Cottonwood in two days. As for the chance at a claim, Buck revealed his pessimism on that score by a series of speculations concerning miners' wages in Cottonwood.

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Wherever along this section of road the trees grew thick or the northern slope of a hollow gave protection from the spring sun, the snow lay in irregular, pitted patches. Already it was crusting with the cold of a mountain night. Nowhere was there a good grazing-ground for our stock. Carefully we rationed our remaining store of oats—so much for to-night, so much for breakfast, a last scanty reserve in case we found that we could not buy feed along the approaches to Cottonwood. Above the ledge of rock where burned our fire, a scant circle of young pines grew on a miniature plateau from which the snow had melted. There we tethered our weary train. After supper, dog-tired though we were, we had still more work. By the light of our candle-lantern I cut a pile of fresh boughs to alleviate the hardness of our bed. Buck, in directing me to do this, apologized to himself for his effeminacy by remarking that we had our hardest day coming.

Himself, Buck felled another dead tree and chopped it up for a night fire. It was a ba-ar country, he announced, to say nothing of catamounts. A ba-ar wouldn't go for a jack, generally; but at this season, coming out meat-hungry, you couldn't tell what he'd take into his head. As for catamounts, the Lord knows what they'd do. Run to-day and fight to-morrow.

Winded with the unaccustomed altitude, I was fain to drop the last armful of wood half-way to our fire and get my breath. I looked upward. Only in the eastward quarter was the full arc of the heavens visible. Above, the sky lay like a spangled leaf, purple-black, shining with stars that were scintillating blobs of brilliance. Their light faintly illuminated the fringe of sceptral pines along the summits. As the ridges rose toward timberline, their bare, knife-edge outline was lit not only by the stars, but by a faint, irregular pink glow. I had to look twice before I saw that this proceeded from campfires burning all along the Cottonwood road and growing thicker toward the pass. The nearest, indeed, glittered just below us, its flames rising straight upward; for the night was absolutely still. In the thin, vibrant air, I could even catch

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the murmur of a conversation punctuated by a burst of laughter. The tenders of these fires had, like us, dropped down and camped, when dusk overtook them, at the nearest snow-free point. It promised a lively day for the morrow. Young and weary though I was, when I had rolled into my blanket and settled my head on my saddle, anticipation banished sleep for at least five minutes.

I had a nightmare. I was a captive to the Indians. They were going to burn me to death. They were already burning Hattie Mitchell, a quite inconsequential little girl with whom I used to play on the beach at Cohasset. The flames had reached her. She was screaming. I broke loose from a dozen warriors, bowling them over with ridiculous ease. The way was barred by a gigantic buck. I hit him. It produced no effect at all. Hattie screamed again in dying agony—I woke. That scream—it was real. In my state of low morale, I could feel my scalp tightening—and an explosion beat against my very ear. In the dying fire-light, I was aware of Buck, lying with his rifle at ready.

"Catamount!" he said. "Hope he didn't hurt nothin'." He rolled himself expertly out of his blanket, seized our extinguished candle-lantern. "Too damn lazy to wake up and feed that fire," he reproached himself. The blaze had indeed died into glowing embers. I rolled out in turn, stumbled and floundered after Buck. From the circle of trees sounded snorts, the clatter of hoofs against rocks. With reassuring voices we ventured cautiously into the plunging circle of jacks and horses. Buck lit the lantern. The sinful jack whose capacity for mishap had been troubling us all the way up, had managed to skin his right foreleg. Otherwise our herd was damaged only in its feelings. Muttering that he was a jack-ass himself not to have thought of that before, Buck hung the lighted lantern on to a tree; we wallowed back to our fire, replenished it, dumped the snow out of our boots, rolled again into our blankets. I knew nothing more until Buck shook me

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and I saw that the eastern edge of the sky below us had begun to glow.

The stars were fading and a shrill dawn-wind was blowing down the gorge when we finished our coffee, gave the last touch to our packs by adding our tin cups and plates, saddled our horses, mounted. As I tied the straps of my cinches, I noticed that they drew two inches tighter than they had yesterday; before my very eyes my valiant little roan was growing lean and drawn.

"To-day," remarked Buck, turning back in his saddle, "we 'tend to business—understand me!"

For a twisted mile, our train scrambled from ledge to ledge, then slid into the main road. It was full daylight now; the half-frozen mud had a consistency of soft rubber, and each burro landed with a kind of elastic "plop." We rounded a pinnacle of rock. Above us, the road carried for a mile or so straight up a twelve per cent grade; and I saw that we were at the tail of a procession. Just before us, a great, black object on wheels seemed entirely to fill the roadway. As we approached, it struck a hump; stopped; and I made it out to be a boiler, strapped to a cradle of poles. Violent profanity punctuating a chorus of "gid-ups" tore the morning air. Harness and running-gear creaked, black-snake whips cracked. The boiler shivered and started, and above its bulk appeared four long ears wobbling unstably; these disappeared to be replaced by another set and yet another as span after span of the sixteen-mule team made the grade and plunged over. Beyond, the slow, wavering procession showed here and there the dirty white of a covered wagon; and far above, where a fortunate drop of the hill-level afforded a side-trail, pedestrians crawled along a patch of snow like troops of black ants. Even at that distance their figures, bowed under their packs and blanket-rolls, gave a sense of tremendous effort and toil.

The hill-side to our right, indeed, began with sheer cliffs and castle rocks, and turned only a little above our course into a giddy slope. Side-trails passable for jacks there were none;

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and the road itself was so narrow that no two vehicles wider than a buckboard could pass. Bulky wagons, like those of the freighters and this boiler-outfit, blocked it absolutely. But here and there the irregularities of the hill afforded a small stretch of level ground at the roadside or a passing constructed to accommodate down-coming traffic; of which, at present, there was none. All the morning Buck, leading our train, was taking advantage of these places—as now. His hand went up, beckoning frantically. I urged our train into a trot, into an awkward, constrained gallop. We emerged into an open space before the sixteen-mule team, trotted fifty yards, and pulled up at the tailboard of a heavy emigrant wagon.

We grapevined through the press. On one of our detours, we ran into a soft spot. The burros, freeing themselves by a series of hysterical flops and struggles, pulled out their feet with a noise like that of a popping cork; but this time it was my own roan who floundered and bade fair to stick. I threw myself out of the saddle, dragged him somehow on to the firm earth, and Buck, taking no further chances, drove the train with sinister cracks of his black-snake whip back to a space between two standing freight-wagons. For the column was now halted; some kind of jam had blocked traffic ahead. I threw a leg over the saddlehorn, scraped the mud from my caked boots, and waited. I noticed that I was still panting from the exertion of dismounting and pulling out my horse. I glanced at Buck, who sat regarding the jam ahead with a calm but eager eye. His lips were red as though with cosmetics. We must be getting pretty high up, I reflected, and looked about me.

The road, laid with an eye to speed of construction rather than to scientific gradation, ran above the course of a mountain stream, main source to a mighty river which flowed six hundred miles eastward before its waters blended with the polluted Mississippi. Somewhere in the infinite whiteness above, it sprang from melting snows; somewhere in the infinite pink haze below, it tumbled out on to the mesa. Our course ran almost due west; behind, a brilliant sun had now

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risen above the mists, and was transforming the patches of snow about us to fields of diamonds. A grey cliff, the sagebrush in its clefts already beginning to turn a delicate grey-green, hid the mountain-shoulder to our right. But across the stream to our left a magnificent ridge ran green and brown, grey and white upward to timberline, where its shadows merged with the indefinite white of the higher reaches. Tall, straight, symmetrical trees clothed it as stiffly and thickly as his quills clothe a porcupine. This was my first sight of the lodge-pole pine; and I wondered then, as I have wondered always, how anything so mathematically regular could be at the same time so mysteriously beautiful. Twice or thrice I looked upward, trying to trace the higher contours of the range. Each time I must needs turn my eyes away; the morning sun on that wilderness of melting snow was bright beyond endurance. But I did glimpse a peak with a splash of grey cliff along its side peeping out above the universal whiteness; and at one place where the range made a definite, dazzling line against the indigo sky, I could see a notch. That must be our pass.

Buck, perceiving that the line showed no signs of movement, dismounted by way of easing his horse. He too had been sweeping his eye over the vision above.

"Meltin' weather," he remarked. "Above timberline, it will be all snow and hell!"

Each of these dazzling diamond-points, in fact, was a drop of water caressed from the packed glacial snows by the hot morning sun. The creek below was not as yet swollen to the full capacity of its banks, but it rushed as though driven from some mighty hydrant—now tunnelling through a mound of snow, now sliding over a field of snow, now running almost calmly across a level stretch where all snow was gone and the earth lay wet and black. In these hollows the quaking aspen had begun to sprout its gentle spring green, ferns to unroll, dwarf herbs to carpet the ground. I tried again to raise my eyes to the dazzling white wall above. The line between snow and sky was no longer definite. Even since I last looked, a tumble of clouds had pushed past the peak; was moving north-

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ward and upward. Light but palpable, majestic but bulky, it travelled and changed shape with a speed which I had never witnessed before in cloud-movement; yet in our cleft of the mountains there stirred not a breath or puff of wind. I had seen before such an effect of rapid, certain movement of gigantic yet graceful bulks—where? Then I remembered the paintings of Rubens. Only he merely suggested movement. . . .

"Damn jackasses!" exclaimed Buck from my side. I followed the gesture of his mud-spattered buckskin glove. Beyond us, the bed of the stream widened in one of the level places to a miniature lake. Across its nearer edge lay what resembled a brush-pile, over which the water tumbled in little cataracts. Three men were tearing at the brush. Suddenly it seemed to give, to break; with a rush of dirty water, the pond began to discharge itself. The men jumped aside, drew their revolvers and stood on the bank, watching the water. Presently I saw that some small brown creature was swimming downward, half submerged, and that another wriggled awkwardly on the bank. A fusillade of pistol-shots broke out from among the three men; the creature on the bank gave a spasmodic leap and lay still. One of the men ran forward, lifted the carcass, held it up to the wagon-train. From somewhere out before me rose cheers with a touch of sarcasm in their tone. The two others were running down-stream, still shooting at its surface.

"Beaver!" said Buck laconically. "And they ain't tender-feet either!"

"How do you make that out?" I asked.

"Way they went at it. Knowed that if you tear down a beaver's dam, he's helpless. And ought to know that skins in this season ain't worth a continental."

"Pure destructiveness," I remarked.

"You bet!" responded Buck, almost emotionally. "Lot of that in this man's West."

This species of ours must, I suppose, destroy before it can create; but in the beginning of its tasks, it is more destruc-

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tive even than nature. The grove across the river-bed, for example. A whole geological era long, the ancestors of those sceptral pines had bristled over the gigantic slope of that hill-side and, save for a rare bolt of grounded lightning, had known not the goblin destroyer fire. Before that summer was over, some smouldering match flicked from a smoker's fingers, some carelessly banked camp-fire, was to transform this range by day into a gigantic pall of smoke, and by night into a red furnace filling half the sky. Thereafter for twenty years what had been a grove was to lie across the lower summits a blackened waste.

The line moved at last; we found a side-trail running across smooth rock, and avoided, for the time being, a jam which grew thicker and thicker as we advanced. And now both our trail and the main road spilled out upon a small basin in the mountain-side. Here, so newly built that the ends of the logs still showed the bright white cuts of the ax, was the first human habitation we had beheld for two days—a half-finished double cabin. Its windows stared sashless at the mountain sky, and stitched gunny-sacks served it for doors; yet its surroundings were already garnished and gardened with heaps of rusting tin cans. Behind it stood a substantial pole corral, in whose far corner a blacksmith toiled at an open-air forge. The larger side of this structure bore the sign, "Stage Transfer Station"; the smaller, "Saloon. Wines, Liquors and Cigars." These legends were lettered on rough pieces of board, the *n*'s and *s*'s turned the wrong way. In the little park before this settlement, not only the stage but a score of other vehicles had come to a halt as though getting wind for the supreme effort. For it took no mountaineer's eye to see that the climax of our journey rose now sheer before us. The road ascended almost straight and lost itself over that notch which I had marked in the dazzling sunrise and which now, in the level rays of mid-afternoon, I might behold with steady eyes. A little above us, timberline ran across the snows a line mathematically straight. From there on, all was unspotted white; even the grey cliff of the commanding peak lay hidden

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behind a shoulder of nearer mountain. All save the road—as that entered the great white wilderness, it ran for a time as a stretch of trampled brownish-yellow mud, then itself became a part of the universal whiteness, distinguishable only by the shadows of its furrows. But it was dotted like a string of irregular black beads with the congested traffic, among which, like particles flecked from the beads, toiled foot-passengers. Ours had been only one of half a dozen roads converging into the main highway. All, like us, had camped and waited until morning for the final dash. And as by common consent, all seemed to have stopped here to make an early luncheon. None had delayed to light a fire. There was no real need; for beside the shack stood a smoking kettle, from which a man in overalls and jumpers was ladling hot coffee into tin cups.

"We'd better wait to eat until we make the pass," said Buck. "Your wind will be better on an empty stummick. But we might as well git a shot of that." We rounded up the jack-train, eased the saddles of our perspiring horses, and drew nearer the cabin. On our way we curved about a dingy, spattered covered wagon from which four children, bundled in ragged clothes to their very ears, gazed on us with bright and curious eyes as they munched great slabs of bread. Behind them, a flat outline in the shadows of the cover, a broad-shouldered, broad-breasted woman was nursing a baby; and at the tailboard a big red-and-white milch cow pulled with lowered head at the tether about her long horns. Next stood a huge freight-wagon, its driver and assistant lunching atop the canvas tarpaulin from a miner's dinner-pail; and next, just before the impermanent door of the log-cabin, the stage. Hostlers had unharnessed its four horses, were rubbing down and feeding in the corral. The passengers sat on the steps or leaned against the wheels exchanging hard-boiled eggs and ham sandwiches from the lunch-boxes put up that morning in the last stage station below. And all that hollow of the mountains reverberated with laughter, with chatter gay almost to hysteria, which seemed to reach its diapason in that cabin labelled "Saloon." This raucous clamour drew me; after I

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had paid my quarter and carried away a pint-cup of a steaming hot liquid compounded of condensed milk, brown sugar and a dyestuff which passed for coffee, I strayed over to the door while I drank.

The bar, constructed from a rough board set on a cradle of logs, was almost indistinguishable behind a row of bent backs in frieze ulsters, in buffalo-coats and in broadcloth. One, indeed, was that of a woman in wine-coloured silk, above which drooped the ostrich feathers of a hat wholly inappropriate to hard travel; as I looked, she turned, revealing a set of blond frizzes now degenerating into wisps, a hard but bright eye, a loose mouth; and pledged the man next her with a full glass of whisky. She dashed it off, then threw her arm about his neck and whispered into his ear something which set him off into roars of extravagant laughter. In a corner stood a table, the bark still on the rough poles which served it for legs. There sat three men, playing stud poker with actual gold and silver coins for chips. One of these, very dapper in spite of his mud-stains, I classified by his air of affected carelessness as a professional gambler, already beginning his harvest.

Buck, stirring his coffee, had also strolled over to this focus of social interest.

"Hell of a lot of 'em will never make it," he remarked, wiping coffee-stains from his beard with the back of his hand. "Red-eye whisky and altitude has got away with better men than there are in this outfit."

And as though to make his prophecy instantly true, one of those figures at the bar slouched rather than fell to the floor, sat for an instant, then let his torso topple limply. Instantly he was surrounded by stooping, clutching figures; out of the babble of sound I heard: "His heart!"—"Give him air!"—"Git some cold water!"—"Git a doctor!" The woman in the loud wine-coloured dress pushed through the press, throwing men left and right, settled her silken skirts on to the filth of the floor, took his head on her lap. I peered over the surrounding figures. His eyes were staring; his lips opened round, gasping like those of a hooked fish. Past me brushed a man

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as bearded and rough as any of us. He carried a little black valise, and he was saying quietly, but with authority: "Let me through. I am a doctor." Scarcely had he passed when a woman with a shawl over her head and a pair of man's heavy boots on her feet detached herself from the curious crowd about the door, gave a scream which tore my every separate nerve, and threw herself down beside the huddle on the floor. The doctor was rummaging through his bag. He spared just a moment to thrust her firmly aside, saying:

"You're his wife, aren't you? Well, he'll be all right if you let me attend to him; but he won't by any means if you interfere!" The woman controlled her voice to spasmodic, choked sobs. The doctor was filling a hypodermic syringe. He looked up just long enough to say:

"Someone clear this room. We need air!"

Subdued to unquestioning obedience, we filed or crowded outside, exchanged news and speculation. This, it appeared, was a couple who had started on foot. The stage passengers remembered passing them that morning, and noticing that the man looked tired. Paterfamilias of an emigrant outfit had camped beside them the night before, and extracted gossip. He was a sign-painter from Plested's. Learning that wages were good in the new camp, and having no money ahead, he and his young wife had elected to "tramp it." Just then an outburst of the woman within set the last line to the story.

"I told him his heart wouldn't stand it!" she wailed.

The doctor emerged, evidently going back to his buckboard for some drug or implement which he had forgotten.

"How 'bout it, doc?" called someone from the crowd.

"He'll pull through this time, I guess," called back the doctor over his shoulder, "but he must get down out of here as quickly as he can."

Immediately the session turned into a town-meeting, discussing ways and means for sending the invalid to lower levels. Public sentiment seemed to harness the duty on to the stage company. Everyone was going up nowadays and no one coming down; the stages ran back to Plested's nearly empty.

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But that grasping monopoly! However, the agent of the company, keeping close to his own door lest anyone attempt to rob his till, settled that.

"Of course we'll take 'em back," he said. "Half our eastward traffic is busted tenderfeet that can't stand altitude."

The episode seemed closed; the town-meeting was adjourning to its various luncheons, when Buck spoke sharply from beside me.

"Well, and is that all?" he inquired. "How's he goin' to live in Plested's till he gets well? Somebody pass the hat." His eye stopped on a cheery-faced woman who had been doing most of the talking; his voice passed from commanding to respectful, deferential. "S'pose you do it, missus," he said. "Here's a five to start you." Someone produced a tin pie-plate. Before silver cart-wheels and gold half-eagles had ceased to ring on its bottom, Buck had drawn me away.

"Losin' time," he remarked. "Won't make it before tomorrow night, best we can do." So we tightened cinches and packs; and as we swung into the saddle, Buck pronounced the final line to this episode.

"Lost out before he even got thar," said Buck.

I had wondered why the stage waited so long; why it did not harness up fresh horses and dash on. Also I had noticed in the small park a flock of heavy freight-wagons standing covered but with the mules unhitched. As we bunched the burros, sent them slipping and plopping forward in the ooze of the road, Buck explained.

"Thar comes the stage-sled," he remarked.

"The stage-sled?" said I.

"Sure. Stage only runs to the station. They skid 'em over the pass, and pick 'em up with another rig on the other side. Same with the company freight in them wagons. Rest of us have got to root hog or die. Going to be a hell of a morning," he added pessimistically.

Now the sleigh—piled with buffalo-robos, drawn by four horses—had passed us. We traversed without accident the muddy stretch of road; our burros were struggling for footing

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in packed snow which amounted to ice. Ahead of us, blocking our way through half of that last Arctic two miles, toiled a farm-wagon drawn by a team of big American horses, loaded with boxes, bales, a tent, all manner of camp paraphernalia, and staffed by four men. At every sharp rise of the grade, either the rear wheels would begin to slip and "run standing" or one of the horses would lose his footing and go down. Then the passengers, all walking beside the rig, would lay hold on the wheels and help out; or, when a horse fell, would cut with a pick a purchase for his hoofs and urge him up with jerks at his bridle and lashes of a black-snake whip along his flanks. The nigh horse, a big but awkward bay, had already calked himself a dozen times in this process; blood was trickling down the mud which caked his legs and feet. Buck and I had dismounted, were leading our own horses. Yet twice my roan—though he had been newly roughshod at Plested's—slipped, fell, and lay waiting dumbly inert until I pulled him to his feet. Even this exertion made me pant until my lungs seemed about to burst my chest. It had grown colder; and now shrill spurts of wind came cutting down from the peaks; yet my skin was sticky with a weak, cool perspiration.

Voices carry far in those altitudes. It seemed to me that I could hear the sound and emphasis of every word spoken for a mile before and behind. Yet words came seldom, and then only commands fringed usually with strings of oaths. Everyone was saving his breath. But suddenly, in a halt of the line, rose a commotion from far ahead. The driver of the farm-wagon clambered to the seat and stood on it for a better view.

"What's up?" called Buck.

"Hoss down—dead, I guess!" came from the wagon.

"Watch 'em—I'm going to take a look!" said Buck, and disappeared on foot about the wagon. The clamour died down, rose again, died, was succeeded by oaths and commands. And just as Buck reappeared round the wagon and took his horse by the bridle, the column moved.

"Hoss dropped in his tracks," reported Buck. "There's a son of a gun up here with an extra team who makes a business

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of hauling stalled outfits over the summit. Wanted twenty-five dollars to do the job. The customer kicked. Then the outfit behind told him he'd got to pay and pay quick and git out of the way or they'd shove his wagon over the edge. Looked like a gun-play for a minute, but there wa'n't no shootin'. He paid." As we struggled forward, I saw the body of the horse caught in a hummock half-way down the hill. He lay on his back, his legs stiffening in the air.

A widening of the road, built so that teams might pass, gave us a chance to advance two places in line and to wriggle in behind a light buckboard carrying what I took for a pair of gamblers. At the next sharp rise of the grade, our pack-train had its first accident. With the instinct of their breed, the burros had hitherto avoided the slippery spots and held their footing in spite of their tiny hoofs. But now the big fellow who had caused us all the trouble two days before slipped to his knees, rolled heavily over on to his side. Because he was larger of frame than the rest, we had loaded him on that morning of the supreme effort with the heaviest of our mining equipment. We had not calculated on the inherent asininity of his character. This time, instead of waiting patiently for man to get him out of trouble, he struggled violently though vainly, bidding fair to break our shovels and his own legs. Buck leaped forward, sat on his head until he accepted the inevitable and lay quiescent. Not only had the saddle shifted until the burro lay on his pack, but Buck's scientific arrangement had been knocked all askew. There was nothing for it but to loosen the cinches, slip him out of the saddle, and pack again,

"If I hold this line up, there'll be shooting!" remarked Buck under his breath. "Got to pack this stuff to a level spot somewheres." And hard on this, the freighter behind us, driving six mules with a jerk-line, called:

"Well, git out of the road! Git a move on!"

Buck rose to his full impressive height.

"If you want us out of the way," he said, "ye kin drop that pretty jumpin'-rope of yours and help!"

The buckboard went on, revealed a hundred yards ahead

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a cleft on the hill-side down which, when the snows began really to melt, a stream would tumble across the road. There we assembled our jacks and our horses. As we returned to the scene of the jam, I met the freighter and his assistant toiling up with part of our paraphernalia. When Buck had loaded himself to capacity, there were left only the pack-saddle, a shovel and an ax. Possessing myself of these, I staggered stride by stride behind Buck for at least ten yards. Although I was young and full of foolish pride in my own strength, I could keep up with him no longer than that. I straggled into the creek-bed far behind, dumped my load and dropped myself across it in the last stage of exhaustion. However, even the mountain-inured Buck, I noticed with satisfaction, was fain to squat on his heels and rest himself for a minute. Then he sprang up, prodded the recreant burro into position with the sole of his boot, began to saddle. By the time we had remade the pack to our satisfaction and rejoined the line, we had lost a dozen places.

Now a white ridge rose just above and beyond us. Already I had absorbed enough mountain lore to know that summits are illusory; for ever you are climbing across what appears to be the supreme point, only to perceive greater heights beyond. Yet common sense and experience could not down hope; for, above everything else, I wanted at that moment a chance to sit down and just pant. My hopes were half fulfilled. Beyond lay not indeed the summit, but a round, wide and gentle slope which stretched a glittering white expanse to the skyline. We had passed the sources of the stream above which we had been toiling all that day. And across this half-level ground ran a dozen trails, beaten hard, where pack-trains and pedestrians had found footing. We turned into one of these. Buck mounted, and I, with more relief than I can tell, followed his example. He did not need to inform me that this was the final dash to the pass, for which he had been harbouring the strength of our horses. With menacing cracks of his black-snake whip, Buck kept our burros climbing at a fast walk. And now we passed a low ridge and I saw that the line of

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the horizon no more made a sharp cleft between dazzling white and deep blue. It was slashed with the black silhouettes of men, horses, wagons. The men, I perceived at a second glance, all stood with their backs toward us.

"Thar she be, I guess," remarked Buck. He himself had a catch in his breath. In those days none had measured this quarter of the Rockies, but I know now that we were much more than eleven thousand feet above sea-level.

"Kin leave the jacks for a minute," Buck went on. At a cautious trot, which set the sides of my own horse to pumping against my legs like a bellows, we advanced to the group on the horizon-line. It remained the horizon-line; no further heights showed beyond. We pulled up beside a freight-wagon, and——

The view burst all at once, without preliminary glimpses. I had come out at the top of a cliff, which fell away for a hundred yards below my feet. I was fronting a valley of such magnificent amplitude as I had never seen before, even in the Rockies. Across lay the white mother of ranges. It seemed an immeasurable distance away; yet it seemed also to fill a third of the heavens. Along its middle the forests slashed a line of dull green; above that was only white, which stretched, glittering fold on glittering fold, from infinity to infinity. Only sheer white, unstained by man—and yet what colour! Though the sun was now past its zenith, still the pink Alpine glow radiated from the shadows behind those points and spurs whose composite whole formed the greater peaks. Above timberline a pale reflection of the forests spread across the white expanse an impalpable tint of Nile green, which became pale gold in the hollows. And softening the abrupt line between range and sky, rose the phantom of a mauve mist.

In the warmer valley below, the snows had melted; its bottoms ran through the landscape a line of greenish brown, from which glittered here and there the golden folds and turns of a polluted river. Far to the right the range which we were now traversing curved to meet the divide beyond. In that quarter the whiteness was broken by the composite tints of

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cliffs and rocky walls too steep for the clinging snow; and over their bases trailed a smoke-cloud.

"Thet's it!"—a voice by my side brought my soaring thoughts back to earth. A freighter, his legs bound like puttees with gunny-sacking against the cold and snow, was pointing; and the less experienced Argonauts grouped about him were straining their eyes. I followed the direction of his finger. That cloud, a day's journey away, rose from the fires of the camp, the El Dorado in which some of us were to find fortune and some to leave our bones. All along the edge of the cliff, men and women stood talking in excited exclamations, broken suddenly with a catch of the breath. Buck, having taken one long look, rode back to round up the pack. I shirked and stayed, fascinated.

The warm spring sun had only begun to soften the crust. It seemed always, as I walked, that my feet were about to sink through it; then it packed and held. Even the horses did not sink. But, imperceptibly, it was melting. Down the immense slope below, glittering streams found a course in every hollow and crease. Across the grey rocks which thrust themselves here and there above the surface of the snows, tumbled misty veils of cataract. The better to see this nearer slope, I advanced dragging my horse to a place where the irregular edge of the cliff ran out to a little promontory.

A lone traveller stood there, gazing. He was a small man, clad in an enveloping frieze ulster and a battered black hat. He turned on me, as I approached, a bright grey eye. The nose under it was strong at the root, and yet sharp. A long, thick moustache drooped between spare cheeks shaven only that morning—a detail worthy of comment in those surroundings, where most men wore beards varying in age from four days to thirty years. Even as he stood looking at me with the receptive air of a person ready to open a conversation, he radiated energy and alertness.

"Hello!" he remarked. "Well, what do you think of our West?"

At which I bristled within. I had been nearly a year in

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the man's country; I had just brought a jack-train, alive and in good order, up Ludlow's Pass; I wondered how much longer I was to suffer the reproach of tender feet. But I managed to answer with what good nature I could summon:

"Considerable country."

He laughed pleasantly.

"College-bred, too, I'm betting!" he commented. Somehow his friendly manner seemed to strip the offence from this dreadful insinuation.

"How did you penetrate behind my mask of ignorance and vulgarity?" I asked, falling into the spirit of the occasion.

"It's my business," said the stranger, "piercing and penetrating the masks and disguises of the human soul."

"Sounds to me like gambling," said I, matching his impudence with impertinence of my own. "What's your line? Three-card monte, or the little pea under the little shell?"

"I almost hate to tell you," said the stranger, "lest you shrink from me. It's the greatest gamble of all. And the most squalid and soul-destroying. That peaceful village yonder—" and he waved his hand to the smoke-stain amid the whiteness to the north—"has hitherto proceeded on its simple, rustic way, hiding and concealing from prying eyes its microscopic peccadilloes such as murder, highway robbery, brace faro boxes and claim-jumping. I come to destroy that golden age. In yon lumbering wain repose the sinister tools of my craft—two fonts of nonpareil and seven boxes of assorted job type. Casting your eyes further to the eastward, you perceive an individual bearing all the marks and characteristics of a tramp printer, temporarily sober. He's conveying a second-hand flat-bed press, warranted not to register in any climate. What you behold, young but sapient sir, is the embryo of that great light-bearer, the *Cottonwood Courier*." As suddenly as he had begun it, he dropped our old Western game of chaff and rhetoric, held out his hand. "My name's Marcus Handy," he said. "I've pulled up my newspaper by the roots from Quaker Creek, which is played out as a camp, and I'm locating in Cottonwood—if I get there!"

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I introduced myself.

"You're mining, I suppose?" asked Marcus Handy, this ceremony over. "Didn't know," he added hastily, "but you were starting some kind of a business, and might want to advertise. I've picked up a few ads along our primrose-dotted wayside."

"Already?" I asked.

"Oh, sure! You can't start too soon. There's a grocer, of course, and an assayer, and a brewer—he'll start up as soon as we get a railroad—which is maybe never! Until then, I'll be running his preliminary announcement. And half a dozen saloons. They're easiest of all," he added reflectively, "but sometimes it takes a sheriff and a gun to collect." As we talked, we had turned our backs to a shrill, new wind blowing up from the immense depths below, and were facing the picturesque confusion at the summit of the pass. The crowd was growing—none so unimaginative as to grudge ten minutes for a look at the Valley of Fortune. But the earlier arrivals were now recinching, giving the last trim to loads or packs, and disappearing downward round a shoulder of rock. And as they passed from view, Marcus Handy, who had been busily gathering items for his first number, described them all with a short phrase or two. It seemed to me that he knew our impermanent caravan as one knows the town where he has dwelt all his life. That buckboard carried a new gambling-outfit from Texas. "From the way they stalled when I asked them questions, I guess they were run out of town," said Marcus Handy. "Have to keep my eye on them. They'll make stories!" A democrat wagon rounded the curve. Beside the driver sat a woman with the collar of her sealskin coat drawn up about her ears. "Didn't solicit ads for her establishment," said Marcus. "This is a respectable family journal. But I expect that wagon there is loaded with cosmetics, face powder and Mother Hubbard wrappers."

"Looks respectable enough," said I.

"Except for the sealskin," replied Marcus Handy. "Brand of great prosperity when you've made your stake. Can wear 'em to church. But coming in—brand of sin. Or what you'd

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call sin in the effete East. Here, it sometimes takes a bishop to draw the line."

Now, outfits which we had passed even before we reached the stage-station had attained the summit. Always the passengers dismounted and laboured forward for a view of the promised land. A memory which I had been trying to seize came forward from the back of my mind—that climax of the "Anabasis" where Xenophon's weary Greeks reached a height and stood crying: "The sea! The sea!" Latest of all these arrivals was the covered wagon carrying five children and trailing a cow, which we had seen at the stage-station that morning. The elder children trudged in line behind their father; the woman came behind, carrying the baby bundled in an old plaid shawl.

"There's a funny one," commented Marcus Handy. "That outfit hasn't got the mining fever—not one little bit! They're homesteaders born and bred, native Missourians subsisting solely on roots, herbs and berries. He's been living on what the grasshoppers left in bleeding Kansas; and he's figured that he can't do any worse up here. Thinks if he can locate a quarter-section somewhere near Cottonwood, he'll get rich selling garden truck and hay. Come to think of it," added Marcus Handy, "maybe they're a little less crazy than the rest of us. Go and talk with them. You could cut their Missouri dialect with a knife!"

However, as I approached the group against the sky-line I could see that they were absorbed in intimate conversation, and forbore to interrupt. But I heard the man say:

"Looks like a good, growin' country."

And the woman, making with her bundled baby a Madonna-like silhouette against the sky-line, answered decisively:

"Paw, here we stay!"

Then came Buck's voice, calling. I knew that he had arranged the pack to his own minute satisfaction, and that the final dash to Cottonwood had begun. Sparing time only to wolf two sandwiches of camp bread and frizzled bacon, we rounded the rock. Below us, the road zigzagged with many a hairpin

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turn down the mountain-side. As it lost itself among the dwarf firs at timberline, its shadowy grey-white turned to reddish yellow.

"There's mud down there," I remarked.

"You bet!" replied Buck. "Mud's going to be our curse the rest of the way. Reminds me," continued Buck, "of that old Pike's Peak story. A tenderfoot hoofing it seen a hat in the road and kicked it. And he heard a voice out of the mud saying: 'Go easy on that hat, pardner. There's a horse and saddle under me.'" Buck, in contrast to most Western men, rarely spoke in parable and anecdote. By this I knew that sight of our goal had raised his spirits.

As we rounded the shoulder of rock, the view burst on us again. I turned in my saddle toward that distant, grey mist which was Cottonwood Camp. And my imagination flashed a picture of the town. Ridiculously at variance with Cottonwood as it was, it long persisted, even after I saw the reality. In the foreground, regarding the sights of that rough mining-camp with superior but understanding eyes, walked—Mrs. Deane, the lady of the hold-up episode. Then, my mind shifting from imagination to speculation, I wondered what she really was doing. She had joined a husband, waiting for her in Cottonwood, doubtless. . . .

Did she know that I had just lived through the pure, magnificent experience of that view across the valley, as she must have lived through it two days before? Did she know that I had safely passed the summit and was coming down the long path of adventure? . . . I suddenly pulled myself up, cursed myself for a sentimental, egotistical young fool, and slapped to action a lagging burro.

CHAPTER IV

“TOO MUCH FOLKS”

I TOLD you—too much folks!” grunted Buck as he loosened the cinches of his weary horse. I paid no attention; Buck had been repeating that phrase like the response of a litany ever since we crossed the path and threaded the more intensive traffic rushing into Cottonwood. I threw my stiffened legs out of the saddle with great relief for myself and still more for my little roan, which I had ridden in this last muddy dash to the limit of his stout bronco heart. I loosened his cinches, eased his saddle-cloth; with a sigh of relief almost human, he settled himself on three legs, drooped his head and rested. Then, instead of helping Buck to relieve the burros, I took time to look about me. So intent had we been on the business of fighting mud and jamming our light outfit through the heavy traffic, that I had until now only jumbled impressions of freighters geeing, hawing, tugging at jerk-lines; of tents and log-cabins by the way; of confused piles of boxes, bales, barrels; of forms digging along a creek bed; of hard work, bustle, optimism, suppressed excitement.

It was twilight—the tactics of our final dash had been to reach camp by night, spy out the land, and make our start for a claim at daybreak next morning. The limpid, brilliant stars were coming out overhead. We stood in a road—I cannot call it a street—curving along the edge of a mountain stream, which ran dark and polluted in the light of the stars. Crazy, as though strewn roughly along the stream line by a giant’s hand, lay log-cabins, some shingled, some roughly roofed with boughs; tents; even one or two rough, clapboarded shacks, showing that the region had already a saw-mill.

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These human habitations, I have said, bordered the road. But they did not run up to it, face it, as in our orderly Eastern streets. Each owner had set down his house solely with regard to the terrain; there had been no time to dig foundations; the doors opened to all points of the compass. Mostly, indeed, there were no real doors, but only curtains of gunny-sacks, now hooked back and revealing the slender flames of lighted candles. Before the tents, men grouped about brisk fires were cooking bacon and flapjacks; the appetizing smell of coffee seemed to stimulate the tang of the mountain air. All about was chatter, punctuated with hearty male laughter. Farther on, the street or road or whatever you might call it rose almost gigantically by contrast into a two-story building. Before this babbled and drifted a crowd. Its chatter came to me punctuated with music—a wheezy cornet rendering "The New York Boarding-House," an accordion accompaniment by a husky, tinny male voice rendering "The Dying Cowboy" with a prolonged wail on the last notes where the doomed man admitted that he had done wrong. Another voice, too, was rising above the babble at intervals: this one shouting monotonously; in a simultaneous rest of the cornet and the accordion, I caught the words, "Make your bets, gents!" and—

"Well, did ye pay for passage in this here outfit?" came the voice of Buck. Properly rebuked, I woke from my reverie of observation and turned to my job. We were in a kind of public park formed by a bend of the stream, and described by the legend scrawled on a board: "Hitch here." About us, in bewildering confusion, stood freight-wagons, strings of mules, promiscuous piles of boxes, bales, barrels. Except for a single horseman, arrived just ahead of us and now unsaddling in the shadow of a freight-wagon, we were the only humans in the enclosure. As I rubbed down my little roan with the dry part of a gunny-sack which Buck had rescued from the mud, I asked humbly:

"What's the program?"

"Git a regular supper of ham an' eggs from a sure enough

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restaurant,” said Buck. “Guess it’s comin’ to us. An’ find the lay of the land. Don’t look good. Too much folks.”

“What are we going to do about the outfit?” I asked.

“Leave it here,” said Buck.

“Unguarded?” I inquired.

“Sure,” said Buck, swinging his saddle on to the irregular pile made by our pack-saddles and their lowering burdens. He condescended, then, a few words in explanation.

“They’d lynch a man quicker fur sneakin’ things out of a public corral than fur stealing a horse—in a new camp like this,” he said.

When we had watered at the pool of an unpolluted brook, when we had judiciously distributed the last of our oats among the whole train, when we had blanketed our horses with tarpaulins from the pack, my impatient young feet were free to follow Buck’s down the full-flowing street. It quivered with excitement, chatter, good humour. That two-story building swung its doors wide open to the street. It revealed a rough room, the walls covered with newspapers. Along the whole farther end ran a bar. It took a moment of inspection to tell that; the first glimpse showed only a long row of men, leaning on their elbows, their stalwart backs hunched, their stretched coat-tails revealing their scabbarded side-arms. Nearer stood three tables fringed with card-players, piled with gold-pieces and buckskin sacks; about the players watched a silent, intent, standing border of spectators. Over all shone the brilliant light of one big kerosene lamp backed by a reflector and the soft, uncertain twinkling of candles, set row on row into boards. A crowd was incessantly climbing and descending the rough stairs to one side of the room. And from above I caught a voice bawling: “Place your bets, gents!” and the unmistakable whirr of a roulette wheel.

Next stood a tent, its top rosy with a faint illumination, light leaking from under its canvas, from the crack in its flapping door. As we passed it, a babble of many tongues died to silence, and a deep male voice, unaccompanied, broke into the first notes of “Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep.” The

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flap lifted to admit a group of spectators. There, taking money at a table, sat the dude whom Buck had forced to dig a long three days before; on the platform, bawling sepulchurally that he rested secure upon the wave, performed the smooth-shaven dude, his partner.

A long, low shack next door emitted the tinkle of two guitars and a violin, a little hazy on their tune but sure of their cadences. Its two windows emitted an exceptional blaze of light. Within, ladies in very short skirts were whirling clumping partners in a waltz, and men were dancing in pairs. The door of this establishment, also, opened as I passed; I glimpsed a lady of whom my first impression was a knee-length yellow skirt and a pair of red stockings, my second that she wore many frizzes and no make-up. She was holding the lapels of a fat man who rolled a little uncertainly on his feet; and I caught her words:

"Just one li'l gold watch for——" The slamming of the door cut out the rest.

In a narrow alley running darkly up the hill were indications of even lower diversions.

A very modest shack, in the light of blazing windows across the street, bore the sign, "Assay Office." The building next most pretentious to the two-story building which we had passed on our first entry to the street, turned out to be a general store. It was open and doing a brisk business. Boxes, barrels, sacks of flour made a confusion within; loose canned goods were piled to the very ceiling. It had no counter; but mid-space of the confusion three men in their shirt-sleeves were scooping beans and oatmeal from barrels into paper bags, literally chucking cans to purchasers, and shoving the gold and silver chucked to them in return into their trousers pockets. Just outside of the door, a man with a close-shaven, dark hatchet-face stood at a little three-legged table swiftly manipulating cards and announcing to the crowd: "The quickness of the eye against the swiftness of the hand—who's next, gentlemen? A coward never made a fortune, and a faint heart never won a fair lady!" I saw a long goose-faced fellow of about my own age

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sink a hand with an air of sudden determination into his trousers pocket. But Buck pulled me away before I could witness the parting of the fool and his money.

“What you want, kid, is interest and excitement,” he said. “What I want is eggs.” Farther down the street, a lantern swung from a pole before a tent, illuminating the sign:

“GOLDEN EAGLE RESTAURANT
MEALS AT ALL HOURS.”

As we edged through the crowd toward this objective, Buck, being very hungry and low in spirits, voiced his pessimism.

“Startin’ for a gold camp six months after the fall discovery an’ a good month after the spring rush begun,” he said. “Was you the fool or was I?”

I had been feeling much the same thing, though with a less poignant disappointment, ever since we came out into Main Street. Professedly, the rush across the peaks was for gold. Unless all the claims had been staked, all the possibilities exhausted, why were people running shops, dives, concert-halls, gambling-dens? I had yet to learn the law of mining-camps and gold rushes, which is also the law of life. Your advance on a strike was like an old-fashioned army with a fringe of camp-followers greater than the army itself. Along with king-natures came slave-natures. Even at the first flush of discovery, there were always men willing to sell their services for plain digging at four or five dollars a day. Where they got the imagination to come at all, I never could see. There were others, again, who really had the gold fever, who failed at the first rush, and who immediately settled back to their predestined places in society.

Besides these, were the more able members of the camp-following who came professedly not to dig but to take it away, in one coin or another, from those who did. They ran upward from the gamblers and their inevitable fringe of women upward to the merchants, assayers, lawyers. Gambling money is impermanent—even a little more impermanent than mining money.

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The rest, I know now—they were the worldly-wise. I have lived long enough to see the end of most careers which sprouted at Cottonwood. Those who took fortunes out of the earth in the days when the Rockies suddenly blossomed with new camps—where are they now? One died in his middle age in Alaska, a common musher on the Klondike trail; one in a cottage in the East, supported by the relatives who had lived hectically on his bounty in the days of his strike; one in the Denver poor-house. Those descendants in the second generation of mining-camp fortunes who in this day struggle for the illusions of social position as their grandfathers struggled for realities, derive from men who came across the peaks not with rocker and shovel, but with merchandise. One fortune that I know of sprang from a livery stable, one from a hardware store, one from a pawnshop; and one had its true beginning in a tray of cheap jewellery and varnished watches carried into Cottonwood by a wandering and adventurous young Jew. Andrew Carnegie, I have heard, said “pioneering don’t pay.” It does not—in any coin which Carnegie would have recognized.

However, Buck and I are in a big log-cabin, the fresh mountain airs blowing through a chink of the mud daubed into the cracks. A long board table bordered with benches runs down the centre of the room; it is faintly illuminated by candles stuck into the necks of whisky-bottles, and by the glare from the cracks and doors of a cook-stove in the far corner. Over the stove bends a man in his shirt-sleeves; a waiter, he in a brilliant red shirt, is clearing away from the table tin cups and plates; half a dozen guests are still shovelling provisions into themselves, their elbows, planted on the table, serving like the fulcrum to a lever. Evidently, Cottonwood sups early; the rush is over.

Buck, with a “woof” of animal satisfaction, settled down to the bench, and addressed the waiter.

“What I want is eggs,” he said. “Ham and eggs.”

The waiter balanced his string of tin plates along his arm.

“Why, how-de-do, Commodore Vanderbilt!” he said.

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“Pleased to see you transfer yer valuable patronage from the Astor House!” Having delivered himself in falsetto of this sarcasm, he dropped his voice to its natural note. “The last egg in this here camp,” said he, “was et at six bits apiece yesterday. What you’ll git is venison steak, canned corn and coffee.”

“Where do you wash?” I asked. Again the waiter put on his falsetto tone.

“An’ the dear Prince of Wales!” he said. “Honoured, I’m su-ah, to see your Majesty in our poor abode. Wash! An’ water a dollar and four bits a barrel! There’s my leavin’s out by the back door, if you want to take a chance.”

Having dishonestly stolen a dipper of clean water from the barrel at the back door, having taken one look at the towel and dried myself on a handkerchief scarcely cleaner, I returned to hear and smell our venison steak fuming and sizzling on the cook-stove, to see the waiter seated beside Buck in close conference. As I came within earshot, I caught the word “galena.”

Buck looked up as I approached.

“Been a new discovery while we was comin’ up,” said he, “They’re stampedin’ up the hill for silver-bearin’ galena.”

“I thought this was a gold camp,” said I.

The waiter turned upon me a look which registered contempt for my tenderfoot ignorance.

“You’ll strike anythin’ in these here Rocky mountains,” he said. “Wouldn’t be surprised at diamonds. Yep”—he turned to Buck, seemed to be resuming his narrative just where he left off. “But it gits out that Barney has struck it. Somebody or other—I ain’t sayin’ who—sneaks up and forks a specimen. Galena—assays a hundred and fifty to the ton. Somebody—I ain’t sayin’ who—can’t keep his mouth shut. An’ I’d like to see a diagram of the way the claims lay on the hill. Been some claim-jumpin’, too. Irishman named O’Neil caught one of ’em roostin’ on his lot. He draws and wings him right under——”

“All staked out?” interrupted Buck, stopping at its climax a narrative which apparently bored him, but which I was all agog to hear.

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"Sure!" replied the waiter. "But you can't tell nothin'. How'd you say this would assay?" He pulled from the pocket of his overalls a piece of grey rock with a glitter in it.

"Dunno," said Buck, after an inspection. "Looks pretty rich to me. Where d'ye git it?"

"Grub-stake o' mine," said the waiter. "Got two Dutchmen diggin'! They brought this in to-night." That word "grub-stake" gave me a hint that this waiter was perhaps more than he seemed. The cook bawled from the stove: "All aboard!" indicating that our venison steaks had sizzled to sufficient hardness. And Buck shot a few words at me from the corner of his mouth.

"Want any galena in yours?" he asked. By virtue of the glimpses he had given me into his life, I knew how Buck's mind was working. He was a "free-gold man." Years ago, in the Idaho diggings, he had staked a placer, struck a pocket, and came away with forty thousand dollars. This he had promptly sunk in a silver proposition—had virtually been cheated out of the money, he felt, as I felt too after I heard the story. From that time forth, Buck was a burnt child on anything which required investment for development. Moreover, gold, the aristocrat of the metals, refuses to marry with baser stuff. Even to an inexperienced eye, it is known by its glittering specks. And Buck was in the university sense no mining expert. In fact, he regarded that breed with a scorn which even from himself concealed jealousy. "Free gold's the only poor man's proposition," Buck had said. "Anythin' else—and you're workin' for the Wall Street money-devil."

And so I answered, as I would have been bound to answer in the end:

"Whatever you like."

The waiter stopped to collect from the rest of the guests, now finished and going; then assembled our tin plates of venison along his arm, hooked the handles of two tin coffee-cups into the fingers of his spare hand, and returned with an expert professional swing. He slammed our provender before us, picked up half a loaf of bread from the débris at the other

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end of the table, struck it once or twice on the edge by way of dusting it off, and deposited it, uncut, between our plates. "I kin give you a dob of nice, snow-white butter for two bits extra," he said. That final luxury laid out, he settled himself again beside Buck, his elbows on the table; and when he resumed conversation, he clove by accident near to the heart of the matter.

"Funny to see the way the boys was gettin' rid of gold claims a day or so ago," he said. "Ground that was yieldin' forty dollars a day to partners, let alone a chance at pockets, was goin' for a song."

"Did you git in on that?" asked Buck indifferently.

"Would 'a' if I'd had anybody to dig," replied the waiter. "This here's a better proposition."

"Oh, you own this place, then?" I asked, coming out frankly with my curiosity.

"Sure thing," replied the waiter. "Pioneer restaurant of the camp. Was workin' as a waiter in the Palmer House in Denver when I saw the chance."

"Suppose gold claims is goin' up by now?" inquired Buck casually.

"Yep. But they're still to be got. Feller was in here to-day. Said he'd sell out for a wagon-outfit or jacks or anythin' to git up to the Frozen River country. He's got some sort of notion about that country."

"I know a feller that might do business with him," said Buck. He was looking down at his plate, carving mightily at his steak.

I saw the waiter's eye fix itself upon Buck for a moment before he asked:

"Meanin' an' signifyin' yourself, maybe?"

Buck looked up, met his eye coolly, and became utterly frank.

"Meanin' an' signifyin' me an' my partner here," he said. "We come for gold. I don't say I want your claim, an' I don't say I don't. I want to see the dirt first. I suppose you're the party that owns it?"

"You're smarter'n a whip, old hoss, but you got it wrong

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this time," replied the proprietor. "I ain't the party that owns it. But I'm his agent, sort of."

"How much percentage?" asked Buck.

"Seein's I ain't regular in the mine-swappin' business, I'll let you off for five per cent."

"How you goin' to figure five per cent of a swap, and why don't you stick the other man?" asked Buck. The conversation drifted off to a debate about terms; I let my attention wander to the glimpses of the crowd surging past our door, to the muffled roar of a thousand cheerful conversations, to the spurts of distant music. When I returned my attention to business, Buck and the waiter had evidently reached some kind of agreement. Our host was donning his canvas coat, was calling to the cook: "Keep her goin' till I git back, Johnnie," and Buck was making his preliminary move toward any positive action—he was biting off the corner from a black piece of Climax Plug. I followed, an unconsidered party to the bargain, out into the mushy, crowded road which served Cottonwood for a main street. And as we walked, the proprietor of the Golden Eagle expanded, grew confidential about his business. His name was Huffaker, he said—Jim Huffaker.

"She'll be Huffaker's Hotel soon's lumber comes down," he added. "I made the stake last winter. I hear's how a party from Plested's is comin' up with backin' for a new hotel. I ain't losin' any sleep. The camp's goin' to stand two hotels—an' with the start I've got—— But I'll have to hustle. Jest this week an old stager of a lady from down below stakes out a miners' boardin'-house. Funny thing," he added, "she was in the last stage hold-up. Somebody drove off the bandits before they done me the favour of lifting her roll."

"I heard something about that hold-up," I put in, cautiously. "Did they get the bandits?"

"Nope. Made a chase just as usual an' didn't find hide or hair," said Huffaker. "Bet your bottom dollar I don't send none of my money out by stage." He swung back to his own business then, and touched on a subject which intrigued my curiosity.

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“She brought in a beaut with her,” he said. “This Mrs. Barnaby who’s startin’ to put me out of business says she’s jest a boarder, but if anybody asks me, I’ll be answerin’ and respondin’ that she’s the biscuit-shooter. I don’t know how I’m goin’ to meet competition like that, less’n I send down to Denver for a biscuit-shooter of my own. She’s one of them blondes,” he added, musing; “I guess I’ll send for a brown-ette.”

We were now edging through the crowd; progress was too difficult for conversation; and I had a moment with my own thoughts. His mention of Mrs. Barnaby had brought a slight jerk of my nerves, which even yet tingled in my cheeks. And when he coupled with this the mention of the unknown, a song which had been singing behind my heart for three days seemed to burst suddenly into full tune. Not until that moment, I think, did I even half-realize how deeply the episode of the Cottonwood road had touched me, what was really troubling my inmost thoughts during all that hard journey up the trails. His phrase “biscuit-shooter,” I found, clenched my hands with a sudden resentment; and I waited for the insult which did not come.

But Huffaker had led us into a packed, stuffy little saloon. The object of his search was not there, apparently. We tried another; here Huffaker made inquiries. Yes, Bill Talbot had been seen round camp. Now we entered that two-story establishment, saloon and gambling-house combined, which I had marked as I first entered Cottonwood. The evening rush was on. The fringe of standing spectators about the poker-tables had become a crowd. The row by the bar stood two and three deep; men were reaching over each other’s shoulders for their drinks. They were swaying rhythmically; for altitude intensifies the effect of alcohol, and a general epidemic of drinking, I was to learn later, always follows a strike in the mines.

In one corner three miners, their arms locked about each other’s shoulders, were rendering harmoniously “The Long, Long Ago.” Those nearest were joining in with caterwauls on the long chords, quite unnoticed by the choristers or, in-

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deed, by the company in general. In a corner, three men were flourishing specimens before each other's faces and arguing noisily and violently. One leaned braced against the wall; at intervals a foot would shoot out from under him. He would recover his balance somehow before he spilled on to the floor, draw back the recreant foot, and gaze on his antagonist with a filmed but defiant eye which dared him to make remarks injurious to his personal dignity.

The room above seemed equally crowded, to judge by the tramping, the shaking of the ceiling. Even through our own babble, I could catch the whirr of the wheel, the call of the dealers. The stairway, so narrow that two men could scarcely pass upon it, seemed always crowded.

A series of thumps sounded from above; the footsteps came heavier and with an irregular rhythm. There were shouts, too; then one pistol-shot. Through the door at the head of the stairs burst a glimpse of a man taking three steps at a time. Two miners, just starting to ascend, blocked his way. In the flash of an eye, he jumped like a cat over the rail without touching it, landed on the floor in a heap, got his feet, made like a streak for the door.

Held to the spot by the suddenness of events, I saw a man jump from the crowd by a poker-table, clutch at him. I saw the little man strike out and backward, perceived that as he leaped away he was carrying a knife. He had reached the door when someone thrust out a foot, and he went forward on to his face. One man, then another, fell on him; I lost sight of him in the surging crowd. The babble was cut by the noise of heavy boots and a shout—again from the stairs; down clumped and lumbered a big fellow with a black beard, yelling:

"Don't let him get my roll—grab my roll!"

The man who clutched at the fugitive from the poker-table had been stabbed in the forearm. Blood was running down his fingers, spattering onto the floor; someone was twisting a tourniquet. My mind suddenly co-ordinating, I perceived the situation. The little man, now strangled to quietude on the

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floor, was a pickpocket; he who had just lumbered down the steps had been robbed of his roll of bills. The crowd opened for an instant, giving me a glimpse of the pickpocket's face. It was natively dark, Latin; but now his complexion looked like dirty wax, and the fixed sullen black eyes in his set features held a world of dread.

“Knifed him in a white man's camp”—“dirty pickpocket”—and then, always in a tone that hissed: “Lynch him!” It came again out of the roar: “Lynch him!” It grew until it was a refrain on half the tongues in the room: “Lynch him!” I turned to Buck. His face was hard. Huffaker had stepped back to the wall, regarding proceedings with cold but apprehensive eyes. All the rest, it seemed to me, were bawling: “Lynch him!” I grew faint with what I must see.

A mob, they say, needs only a leader to turn it from a herd of purposeless men to a legion of purposeful devils. In that instant the leader appeared. He was one of the three men who had stood in the corner disputing over specimens. He was short, thick-necked, wrestler-built. He wore a great red beard from above which gleamed an eye as red, and now wicked with whisky and animal hate. He stepped to the centre of the room and spoke; and his voice, a little thick though it was, had a piercing, commanding quality.

“Well, has anybody got a rope?” he asked. This positive suggestion seemed to hush the babble as a muted stop an organ; for an instant there was almost silence; out of which a voice came:

“There's plenty of lariats in the corral.”

“Two of you go and fetch one,” said the leader. “Any of you got a couple of belts to spare? All right, strap his arms and legs.”

As men shot through the back door, as men began stripping off their belts, the babble rose again; but not before I had heard from the thick crowd by the door a kind of low, choking wail, which made me if possible, even more sick of soul. It flashed upon me that I might make some countermove in the interest of real justice and of mercy. I looked about; no eye

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but showed fury save only Buck's and the blue, impassive orb of Jim Huffaker. The back door flew open; a man entered with a coiled rope. And then——

"Drop that rope!" came a voice, a voice with ring and carry, which seemed to dominate all the noise. He who spoke stood in the door. Silence fell again—silence and quiet. It seemed that everyone froze in the midst of whatever he was doing—all except the new-comer. He was a tall man with a heavy brown moustache and imperial. He wore a black slouch hat of the G. A. R. pattern; and for all his height he moved with quick, flowing certainty. He did not wait for that mood of frozen hesitation to break; in two strides he had crossed to one of the empty chairs pushed against the wall when the players dropped their game. He stepped into it, stepped just as lightly to the table, his feet crunching on chips and the spilled stacks of twenty-dollar gold pieces. As the silence began to break into sinister mutterings, he spoke again:

"Bring that rope here—and that prisoner too!"

Momentary silence again. He stood, his feet planted apart, a drawn revolver in his left hand—which I thought odd. It rested so, close to his body, its muzzle a little lowered. His eyes seemed to take us all in.

The leader of the mob stood alone in the middle of the floor. He spoke suddenly:

"We'll hang a city marshal as quick as a pickpocket," he said. "Boys, bring on your rope. It's long enough for two."

"Drop that rope!" came from the man on the table, shifting his eyes, shifting slightly the muzzle of his gun.

There the leader made his mistake. The muzzle was turned away from him; he had an instant to act. His hand went to his hip. In the same instant I had a glimpse of a dozen forms beginning a prudent drop toward the floor.

I never saw the man on the table change the direction of his muzzle from the back door to the centre of the floor. The motion was too quick. I was only aware that his right hand, held flat, had brushed across his gun. The "bang" sent the crowd to the floor as a strike in bowling drops the tenpins.

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The leader had his gun out, and no more. It dropped clattering to the floor. His left hand went to his right biceps; and he sank slowly on to one knee.

The man on the table viewed the prostrate throng, cast a quick glance toward the door. The crowd had fallen away from before the prisoner; but two volunteer jailers still held him by the arms, already trussed for the scaffold with a belt. His knees were giving under him, his eyes were glazed.

A tall, rangy man with a hat like the marshal's pushed through the door.

“Charlie,” said the marshal, “take that prisoner there. You with the rope, come here.” The man with the rope, walking unsteadily, jerkily, crossed the floor. The audience was now beginning to get up; and the marshal spoke again, and again seemed to freeze everyone into a grotesque statue.

“Is there anybody else wants to shoot?” he inquired. No one responded. “All right,” he continued. “There’s been no lynchin’ in this camp yet, and there won’t be. Get that? Somebody fix up the man I just shot. He’s only winged in the arm.” He cast his eye about again. “Your blood was up, boys. Nothin’ like a little blood to cool blood.” His face had been as blank as a stone wall except for the steady blaze of his eyes. But now he smiled, and I liked the way his eyes crinkled. He leaped down from the table, turned his back deliberately on the crowd, began to strip the belt from the prisoner’s arms, to snap on handcuffs. The babble broke out again. Three minutes before, it had an animal note. Now, it sparkled with laughter. Before the marshal, the deputy and their now voluble prisoner passed out of the door, the poker-players were sorting out chips and piles of gold pieces at the tables, the bartenders were taking orders, the stairs were black with an ascending crowd.

“He is sure a shootin’ man,” remarked Buck in a tone of deep admiration. “Who might he be?”

“Town marshal,” replied Jim Huffaker briefly. “Name, Chris McGrath. You’re right he shoots.”

“Who’s mayor of this camp, anyhow?” inquired Buck.

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"Ain't none," replied Huffaker. "A town marshal like that is all the mayor we need—— There! There's our man!" he suddenly broke off, darting past the poker-tables and laying hands on an individual who had just entered.

After all this space of years, the figure of Bill Talbot, who wanted to sell his claim, has grown a little dim in mind; he was to float into my life for a day only, and float out again never to reappear. Nor do I remember many details of the long dicker which he, Buck and Jim Huffaker conducted in a comparatively quiet corner of the Black Jack. As an interested outsider, I perceived, after the first exchange, that my cautious partner and the equally cautious Talbot were both veiling eagerness under an appearance of reluctance.

Huffaker's part was to edge them together. When Talbot had gone so far as to admit that he might theoretically sell, when Buck had conceded that he might conceivably buy, the question rose as to Huffaker's commission. This took even longer. It was established that Talbot was leaving behind a usable set of cooking-utensils and a pair of shovels. We had brought duplicates of these tools and implements. Buck agreed to give Huffaker our pots, pans and shovels if Talbot would add to the commission twenty-five dollars in cash or its equivalent. Talbot protested that he had no twenty-five dollars in cash to spare, but offered instead a silver bull's-eye watch and a pair of gold shirt-studs. Huffaker, after inspecting the watch and studs critically, announced himself satisfied. To my relief—for I was growing bored with the transaction—they solemnly shook hands all round and called it a bargain, provided the goods were as represented. In the morning Talbot was to visit the public corral and inspect our jacks and pack-saddles; then we were to follow him up the creek, where Buck was to make practical test of the claim.

"I suppose your title is O. K.?" inquired Buck.

"Good as the gold you'll dig," said Talbot.

"That's got to be proved," said Buck. "S'pose we kin look into that after I've seen the claim?"

Now watching this transaction idly from the outside, I had

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perceived that Talbot was eager to be gone. What he had up there among the summits, if anything, I never knew; but certainly he was in a state of great expectation. I was not surprised, therefore, when he said, and I felt, with sincerity:

“I wanted to be travellin’ to-morrow mornin’. That’s why I’m sellin’ so cheap.”

“Nothin’ goes until I see your title’s right,” said Buck stubbornly. Here Huffaker came in, as at every hitch in the transaction, with a solution.

“Well, if Chris McGrath says it’s right and sound, you’ll believe him, won’t you?”

“What’s he got to do with it?” asked Buck.

“The whole works,” said Huffaker. “He registers minin’ claims too.”

“Mebbe,” allowed Buck.

So forth we went under the burning stars and through the thinning crowd, to find Town Marshal McGrath. We ran him to earth in the tiny Comstock Lode saloon, his foot on the bar-rail, his hand on a glass of water. The floor-space of the Comstock Lode seemed, at first sight, almost to be monopolized by that bar and a big billiard-table. I wondered at an object so bulky, so little useful for mining operations, in this camp whose necessities had to be hauled a hundred and fifty miles horizontally and five thousand feet vertically. It was, I learned afterward, the sole surviving relic of a camp twenty miles away across the range which had bloomed, boomed, had its little day, and some five years before died completely. A row of candles stuck into bottles, which illuminated the bar, flickered feebly across the forms of six men stretched out across the table, their hats over their eyes, their boots protruding into space. Under the table was another such row; five or six more lay fanwise about the hot, smoking stove in the corner, their heads to the blaze like dogs. Three or four snored; one especially with the buzz and rhythm of a saw cutting timber. But all were sleeping like death, oblivious to the lively chatter about the bar.

Huffaker looked them over as he entered.

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"You kin see what I'd be makin' with a hotel," he remarked. Then, slapping Town Marshal McGrath on the back, familiarly addressing him as "Chris," Jim Huffaker introduced us all. The City Marshal smiled under his moustache that same smile which crinkled up his eyes, lightened them. When he shook hands with me, he did it in a manner to convey that I was the object of his intense personal interest. I was flattered, I must admit now. All the way up to Cottonwood and all through our adventures of that night, I had figured as a young, unconsidered shadow to the experienced Buck. I made so bold on being introduced as to tell him that I had seen the incident in the Black Jack, to compliment him on his shooting.

"Oh, the boys are all right," he said, evading the compliment. "Course, when they're likkered up they will have their fun, and you've got to get the start on them. Billy Dawson's a good fellow," he added—and, without being told, I perceived that Billy Dawson was the leader of the mob—"an' it's only a flesh-wound in the arm." He looked me over again. "Been up this way long?" he asked.

"No, I'm a tenderfoot," said I.

"We were all tenderfoots at the start," said he. "What can I do for you, boys?" This seemed to me the first time, in a year of the West, that my deliberate crime of coming from the East had fully been forgiven.

In two minutes, the marshal had certified unofficially but with certainty that No. 32 placer, held by William Talbot, was a *bona fide* claim without encumbrance, had bitten into the conversation about the bar. As we left, Huffaker asked us about our lodging for the night. That question had been dimly troubling me all the evening. Our blankets were with our packs in the public corral. Sleeping there, on the wet, trampled ground, seemed out of the question.

"I sleep people in my shack," said Huffaker, "keep up the fire all night so you don't need blankets." We found, indeed, a dozen men already snoring under the table of the restaurant.

"Won't cost you nothin', seein's we done so much business—

“TOO MUCH FOLKS”

good night,” whispered our host as he departed to his quarters in the rear.

I threw myself down by the stove of the Golden Eagle and, with one side roasting and the other freezing, slept until the cook woke me by stirring the fire for an early breakfast. In spite of youth, mountain air and fatigue, I was a little time in falling asleep—these had been the most crowded and excited three days of my life.

CHAPTER V

LADIES IN CAMP

CRAMPED in every joint by one night on the hard floor, Buck, Talbot and I rolled out and breakfasted by candle-light. When we started forth the sun had risen for the world below, but for us it shone as yet only on the white-rimmed peaks above. The gulch, the stream and the town itself still lay in shadow. Edging the band of light along the hills, there played an enchanted pink glow. As I watched, I could see that band dancing ever downward; and I went back to my college Greek and understood Homer's rosy-fingered dawn. From the snows of the peaks the breeze came in puffs. A little shrill and piercing at first touch, once you had filled your lungs it whipped your blood like wine.

As we sought, not without some trouble, a place to buy feed for our stock, I had a chance to behold the camp in its business aspect as the night before I had seen it only in pursuit of pleasure. The assay office was already busy, as the crowd round its doors indicated. Next stood the post office, in a log-cabin. A line fifty yards long strung out from the door—men in all varieties of rough clothes, keeping up a cheerful, optimistic chatter, passing plugs of tobacco, matching and comparing specimens.

The Bank of Cottonwood stood next door. It too was a log-cabin; but it marked its own importance by an architectural variation. In all the West—this is partly true even yet—a building with an ordinary peaked gable was just a dwelling-house. But when a square "false front" concealed its gable, it became a place of business. Cottonwood was so new, lumber so scarce and dear, that none of the stores or public build-

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ings—no, not even the Marshal's office—bore as yet this mark of dignity and importance. But the bank, as though to prove it could throw money away, had its false front. Without stood slouching, yet alert, a man with a six-shooter in a holster drooping conspicuously over the front of his hip. He was the guard who supplemented a very flimsy and unsafe safe.

The public corral, where we had left our stock and packs, had as by magic changed overnight. The piles of boxes and barrels which had risen above us when we unpacked and hitched in the twilight, had assumed new shapes; and other piles were growing at the hands of the freighters. The very horses, mules and jacks seemed recent arrivals. As we baited, as we began to rub down our burros with gunny-sacking in order to make them presentable for sale, two mud-spattered men on blowing, lathered, drooping horses spurred into the corral. Without introduction or ado, they hailed us.

"Where's these galena locations?" asked the nearest.

"Up yon way—up the hill!" said Buck, scarcely glancing from his work. With no further question, they jerked the savage Spanish bits in the lathered mouths of their weary mounts, whirled, and spurred straight over the mushy ground, uphill.

"Got the fever bad!" growled Buck, glancing up now. "There was a bunch up in the Idaho diggins'——" Buck's tone ran down to silence as he discovered a rubbed spot on the backbone of the burro at the moment in hand, and started to apply rough and ready veterinary surgery—the affronted animal shooting back his long ears and taking futile nips at the legs of his benevolent tormentor. Buck had an amusing and irritating habit of starting a dazzling reminiscence and biting it short on the first sentence.

Now, Bill Talbot was with us; in the subsequent dickering, the punching and feeling of legs and barrels, the praises of Buck for our outfit, the deprecations of Bill, I took a humorous interest which soon ran down to boredom.

The dicker finished, we saddled, mounted and started to inspect that end of our bargain which most interested us. Tal-

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bot's claim lay a mile up the creek ; but the road was so jammed and miry that we elected to take a side-trail across the hill, which here started abruptly from the road and presently flattened out into a little plateau. As soon as we passed from the slope into the flat, I could see that this stood to become the residence district of our embryo metropolis. As in the borders of the creek, so here tents, cabins, even dirt huts, lay crazily, giving the effect of toys strewn by a careless baby giant. The open spaces between these human habitations bristled with rows of stakes or lay creased with crude fences of fir poles. I learned afterward that this piece of ground had during the winter come to the attention of certain enterprising pioneer citizens, including, of course, Jim Huffaker. They had staked it out as a placer claim—it showed no pay dirt of any kind—and had formed a company which was now selling or leasing town lots.

Near me, as I rounded the slope, I saw a man driving a stake. He wore what looked like a very long overcoat, pinned up in some fashion at the bottom. As I drew near, he glanced my way, smiled and nodded from under his brows. He had a cheerful, bulldog face, peeling with the sunburn of a new coat of tan. It was Father Cassidy, our pioneer priest, staking out the location for his tent-church. Before I reached our claim that morning, I was to see jammed into the traffic of the road an especially dingy emigrant wagon bearing along its side a sign crudely lettered on a canvas strip. "Gospel Tent," it read, "Salvation to the Lord." The winds of doctrine were blowing into our gulch ; and with the memories of what I had seen last night, I felt that the sooner they blew upon us and purified us, the better for Cottonwood Camp.

My eyes were searching now, as they had all the morning been searching half consciously. I dropped deliberately behind Buck and Bill Talbot. And suddenly my nerve-centres gave a jump, my cheeks a little tingle. There was a sign, painted with the cross-line of the "N" turned the wrong way, with the stems of the capitals at all angles from the perpendicular. "Mrs. Barnaby's Boarding-House, Open for Business

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Next Tuesday," it read. Behind it stood a tent, the posts and ridge-poles in place, but the cover flopping in a state of collapse.

Bent down, earnestly and efficiently driving a tent-peg with the butt of a hatchet, was a form which I recognized as that of Mrs. Barnaby. A linen duster covered her ample figure; a man's slouch hat, turned up cowboy fashion in front, concealed her hair, all but a greyish fringe of bang; the rhythmic jerking of her skirt, as she pounded with the energy of her whole body, revealed a heavy pair of men's cowhide boots. In the rear, a big sheet-iron cook-stove, set up in the open field, emitted a faint ghost of smoke from its abbreviated pipe as though a fire which served to get breakfast was now dying out. Beside it were great packing-boxes, some open, some still nailed shut, and all, spite of the conspicuous sign, "Handle with Care," lying as though some freighter had rolled them from the top of his load, and simply let them drop. Over the nearest box, head and shoulders half hidden, stooped the figure of another woman. As I looked, she dropped back on one knee, her arms full of tin plates, and faced me. It was Mrs. Deane. And my first glorious impression was of her hair—brown, chestnut-brown with the same light, in the beating sun of the morning, that one sees in molasses candy when it is being pulled—a tawny undertone which glistens.

It was dressed with the elaboration of current fashion; yet for all the coils and waves in which it crept over her balanced little head, enough was left over for a great knot, like a sack of rusty gold, at the hollow of her shoulders. She wore a plain brown woollen dress, a costume almost innocent of braids, pinkings and gewgaws. From the bustle, the skirt fell in heavy folds which, it seemed to me, did not for all their heaviness hide the liveness of her figure; and the bodice outlined a delicious, provocative curve of shoulder and bosom. She was looking up now, was handing the armful of plates to some man or other, of whom I noticed only the detail of a withered frame and a side-whisker; she smiled, and light seemed to ripple into her eyes.

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It was then I woke from my trance, perceived that I was at halt, that my horse, either because I had pulled him up unconsciously or because he felt my clutch on the reins relax, had come to a full stop and was biting at the bunch grass. I must have blushed, as I perceived something else even more embarrassing. Behind me two other horsemen had also stopped, and a pedestrian had joined us; all were staring.

I had jerked up the head of my protesting horse, was about to give spur and to retreat in confusion, when she looked suddenly our way. Her face lightened with a smile in which I read recognition, and she dropped her load into a box. Feeling that I was managing the whole thing most awkwardly, I swept off my hat, and put it back hastily as I recalled that I had not combed my hair that morning; nor had I shaved for two days. Then she rose; took a step toward me. Embarrassment ran across me in a hot flush; I felt for an instant as I did when, at my first dancing-lesson, they told me to put my arm around the little lady. But I could not now withdraw without even greater awkwardness; and, of course, to withdraw was the last thing I really wanted to do. So I threw myself out of the saddle and, feeling like a clumping, lumbering oaf, crossed the line of Mrs. Barnaby's location-stakes. From the corner of my eye, I perceived that the rest of Mrs. Deane's audience was departing in haste and with movements which showed confusion.

She, on her part, was swaying across the uneven ground toward me, her eyes most friendly but her smile with that same reserve. Now she stopped and held up, palm outward, a pair of strong but slender hands. I noted with one eye that the left had a ring on the third finger; and, as she dropped them with a pretty flutter, that it was a plain gold band.

"I won't offer to shake hands," she was saying; "they're disgraceful with this unpacking. So you landed safely! I hope you staked your claim?"

"I think we're staked," I said, my embarrassment beginning to vanish, to yield to gloomy interior reflections on that circlet of gold. "And you arrived safely?" I managed to conquer

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my state of strange, juvenile shyness sufficiently to look her fair in the face as I spoke this commonplace. Her eyes, vivid violet-blue now in the searching morning light from the snows, were all candour and kindness, yet back of them I still felt a reserve.

"Yes, we're going to have a home soon, Mrs. Barnaby and I! We've been sleeping under the edge of the canvas so far—but it's been great fun! Fortunately, it hasn't rained."

Mrs. Barnaby at this moment rose up from the tent-peg, stood with one hand in the hollow of her back, and broke into the conversation—broke in like a flood.

"We're goin' to—maybe. We're goin' to if they deliver them pans and kittles—that freightin' company robbin' you right at the start and then leavin' out the pans and kittles, and goodness knows what's become of the carpenter I hired at ten dollars a day just to put the floor down which I could do myself—stampeded like a fool to the galena diggin's, I guess—and that sack of flour——" It flowed on, without punctuation or grammar; and from it all I gathered that Mrs. Barnaby's stake-out was merely temporary. She was erecting her tent on the bare ground, taking chances that there would be no rain until the pile of lumber stacked in between the boxes became a floor and a tent-frame. "Anyhow, we open on Thursday if they eat off the stove," concluded Mrs. Barnaby. With the air of one who had delivered herself of all she had to say, she clutched her hatchet and fell furiously upon another tent-peg. There came, then, a rattle of pans from the background. The old person of the withered frame was looking at us from between his side-whiskers with a dull and bleary eye which conveyed a hint. Mrs. Deane heard the sound and turned, first to him and then back to me.

"I'm forgetting my unpacking," she said. "I'm only a boarder, but with everyone so busy, it's a shame not to be doing something."

"I hope I may come to see you and Mrs. Barnaby when you get—settled," I said in parting. I had hesitated for the proper word, and when I came out with that "settled," sug-

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gestive of moving-time in old, ordered New England scenes, we both laughed. Her laugh—I had noticed that before—ran a little gamut, played a half-tune. But the veil of inscrutable reserve behind her eyes had thickened, become momentarily a curtain. The gamut of her laugh died away on a grace-note; and “I hope so” was all she replied. She went back to the boxes then, and I had to remember, as I withdrew and mounted, that it would be bad manners to stare at her over my shoulder. However, as I gathered rein and rode away, I did myself the luxury of another look. She was in her graceful, half-kneeling pose beside the boxes; the morning sun was making tawny gold of her hair.

I realized then that I had only a hazy, general notion of where I was going; and Buck and Bill Talbot were lost to sight. I spurred to the edge of the little plateau. Nowhere in the confused landscape could I discern a pair of horses coloured like theirs. I returned, therefore, to the crowded, slippery road, drove my horse wallowing through the confusion, while I made inquiry for Placer Claim Number 32.

CHAPTER VI

GOLD AND REMINISCENCE

EVERYONE who has picked wild berries knows the greedy joy in that innocent sport. You are getting something for nothing. And each bush, as you approach it, holds out glittering promises of a branch so bent and loaded that you have only to scrape it in order to fill your pail. Gold-digging, for the first three or four days at least, raises the same set of emotions, vastly intensified. All day long, Buck dug and I rocked, or I dug and Buck rocked. My feet were first wet through with standing in the polluted stream, and then, when I worked from the bank, congealed to chunks of ice by the shrill spring wind. Nevertheless I worked with enthusiasm. My reward was that period late in the day when we assembled the scrapings from the riffles of our washer and panned them down still finer with our skillet and an old dishpan. Then at last the tiny flecks of gold began to glitter in the yellow mud. On the second day I even found a nugget about twice as big as a buckshot. This Buck let me keep as a souvenir; after all these years I have it yet. We were shovelling the stream-bed into our rocker before the first glint of sunlight over the range to eastward lit the glow on the peaks of the mother range; we were still panning the scrapings of our riffles when darkness brought out the violent mountain stars.

It was brutally hard work, however. I thought that our struggles on the road had toughened me for anything; but when I woke on the second morning, muscles which I did not know I possessed creaked and ached their protest. My hands looked and felt like inflamed, red blisters, and my wet clothes rubbed me raw in a dozen places.

Above and below us along the stream, other men in groups

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of twos and threes toiled with the same concentrated monotony. And, meantime, just about the shoulder of the hill lay hidden the fascination of Cottonwood Camp. By day, I could hear its rattles and roars, broken now and then by a louder sound on whose cause I could only speculate as I dug and rocked, rocked and dug. That prolonged crash must be a load of lumber, carelessly and hastily dumped; those explosions the blasting for a new road. Once came a series of sharper and lighter reports, followed by the distant, composite clamour of a crowd. This caused backs to straighten up and shovels to rest poised all along the stream.

"The regular man for breakfast, I guess," remarked Buck before he bent again to his work.

It was by night, however, that the sounds and glimpses of Cottonwood became most alluring to youth and loneliness. Its innumerable kerosene-lamps lit with a faint Alpine glow the ridges of the hill which hid it from us. Bands and orchestras, the notes blended in strange but not inharmonic confusion, began with darkness. When the wind was right, I felt that I could even make out the distant babble of voices. On the second night, after we had stowed away our bacon and coffee, I had indeed washed up, shaved, and brushed my hair, with the intention of visiting camp. Buck had spoken suddenly from the corner of our eight-by-twelve cabin, where he was mending a splintered shovel-handle with wire, to ask:

"What ye up to?"

"Thought I'd take a look at the camp before I turned in," I said.

"Grand way to wash gold," remarked Buck. "Do your work all week and lay off like a Christian Sat'day night an' Sunday, or you'll never git ahead in this game."

And though ours was a partnership, I had by now so completely yielded to the guidance of Buck in all things practical, that I accepted the rebuke with docility and turned in instead—to think, until I fell into dreamless sleep, of the camp and especially of that hill-side where a boarding-house must by now stand open for business.

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On the third night, I forced from Buck an answer to a question which he had hitherto evaded.

"How much are we taking out?" I asked.

"First day, 'bout ten dollars. Second wasn't as good. To-day's a little better."

"A piece?" I asked.

"Nope. Together."

"That's about day-wages," said I. "Won't we do any better than that?"

"Oh, cert—if we strike a pocket," replied Buck. "A lot better. There was one good run of sand up in the Idaho diggin's that yielded sixty thousand dollars before she panned out."

I choked back my answer. Speaking generally, Buck was a pessimist. He believed, really and truly, that the Wall Street money-devil had the country in its grip and would never let go until it destroyed our blood-bought liberties. All the way to Cottonwood, he had never packed and started without expressing his certain conviction that the special obstacle of the day—whether mud, snow or steep grades—would plumb wreck us before night. By way of compensation, he became a sappy optimist in face of a prospect. Though he usually took pains to conceal his hopes from me, Buck expected any day to break into a pocket. He had seen others do it; why not he?

Now I, who had laughed inwardly at Buck's dismal prophecies of disaster on the way to Cottonwood—toward the main object of this expedition, I was the pessimist. I could not yet believe in my soul the fact that these picturesque rocks of the mountains held wealth in chemical solution. I had come for adventure. I did not yet consider myself a citizen of the West; I still figured as a spectator at the drama, not an actor. Which may serve to introduce all there is to tell about me, Robert Gilson.

Tracing it back, I realize that the first impulse which sent me adventuring came one night in Holworthy Hall during my

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senior year, and from Harry Tilden. He was a junior, and of a different crowd; in those days at Harvard we were very particular about our classes and crowds. Until that night, Tilden had been to me only a shadowy figure. It was ordained that he should for a moment blaze into a reality and then fade back into the shadows. That night I dropped into Harrison's room on some errand as trifling as borrowing a book. I found a rum-punch steaming on the table; and on the couch lounged Tilden, a big, vital figure of a Californian, caressing the dormitory cat. Some phrase of his caught my attention. I forgot my errand, joined the group lolling in Harrison's three chairs or sitting, knees drawn up, on the floor, and listened.

Tilden was talking of old days in the West. His father had crossed the plains to the Sacramento diggings in '49; his mother had come round the Horn. The family interests, it transpired, now lay invested mainly in a cattle-ranch near a city of a witching strangeness called Santa Barbara. As he described it, he left in my mind a jumbled picture of lolling Spaniards, of friars in ancient gardens, of treasure-hunts, of shooting-scrapes, of long drives after herds of wild cattle, of strange, crude, open-hearted manners and outlook on life. Through it all ran dazzling adventure-tales. His father had served on what he called the Second Vigilance Committee in San Francisco—Tilden seemed to take it for granted that we all knew that episode as a part of history, like the Boston Tea Party. His uncle had fought Indians about Mount Shasta, chased buffalo on the plains and hunted grizzly bears in the Sierra, before settling down to an importing business in San Francisco. As Tilden touched on his uncle, anecdote after anecdote came out—the time he shot a treed bear and the fall of the carcass nearly knocked him over the cliff; the time when he wandered into a camp of hostile Indians, and served as quarry to a wild shooting-chase through the darkness; the time he and a trapping-party, lost in the mountains, discovered an uncharted grove of giant trees.

Like most boys of my time, I had read dime novels—sur-

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reptitiously, for respectable parents forbade them along with cigarettes and other exciting juvenile pleasures. And so I knew that there was a West, full of Indians, cowboys, old scouts on the trail, mining-camps, gambling-houses and hair-breadth adventures. Yet I had never really grasped with my imagination that it was a part of my United States, which my far ancestors had sailed unknown seas to found and my father fought to preserve. It was merely a country bounded by the covers of books, like the Damascus of the "Arabian Nights" or the Troy of Homer. But now I realized, with a kind of intellectual shock in discovering the obvious, that the Far West lay not at the end of the rainbow, but at the terminus of a four-day railroad journey. Details over which my mind had skimmed lazily became vivid, actual, living, in the conversation of Harrison.

"He tracked the crittur"—a hundred times had I read that phrase, set forth in that dialect which the dime-novel writer attributed to the Far West. How you tracked, I had never even wondered. But here was a man who had done it, explaining to us how you identified a lame horse by noting that the track was lighter on one side; how an expert examined the bushes on both sides of the trail for hairs which betrayed the quarry's colour. The prospector of my dime novels had thrown himself from his steed and gone to inspect the "sign." I had never inquired of myself how the horse happened to stand without hitching. Harrison explained in an aside that when you threw the reins over a saddle-horse's head, he thought he was hitched and would usually stand even when frightened. I knew that when a cowboy roped a steer, it fell; I had not speculated on ways and means. In another aside, Harrison dwelt on that expert jerk of the rope, timed to harmonize with the "set" of a trained cow-pony, by which the steer is brought flopping and kicking to his side. He used, as he spoke, a vocabulary full of strange words and phrases which I would have thought affected had I seen them in print—like "rodeo," "cinch," "panned out," "you bet," "corral," "arrojo." We listened to Harrison until long after midnight. Even then,

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I lay awake for hours, weaving golden and melodramatic dreams. And when I woke next morning, the daily routine of calm college life in the seventies seemed flat and uninspiring.

That mood passed, of course. I am not sure whether I ever talked to Tilden again; certainly, it was not of the West. I must have seen him on the day when we took our diplomas and our conventional, illusory advice from the President, but I do not remember. I was graduated with a *cum laude*; as befitted a gentleman, I had proved a good scholar but not too good.

So I found myself back in my mother's colonial homestead by Cohasset Common, with my future as undetermined as on the day when I matriculated at Harvard. It had always been understood that, in spite of the family money, I should "do something." Our stock was still near enough to the stony soil of New England to despise a loafer. But "going on with the business"—the traditional way of doing something in our circles—had been rendered by circumstances inadvisable. My father, dying when I was a child from the lingering consequences of his wound at Cold Harbor, had incorporated before his death the wholesale wool house in Boston which was the foundation of our prosperities, and had turned his other properties into railroad bonds. In my mother, true to type, judicious generosity was mixed with native thrift and economy; through her conservative but intelligent management, the margin of the fortune had increased, even during the hard times of '73. By the terms of my father's will my mother, as executrix, must dole out to me such sums as were necessary to my support and maintenance. On my thirtieth birthday the fortune would be divided; there were only three heirs: my mother, my sister Emily now finishing at a select seminary for young ladies in Boston, and I. And in the course of time and nature, half of my mother's share would come to me. My future, while undetermined, was secure—far, far too secure.

I know now that my mother had always watched me for some sign of a special talent. With the Concord tradition behind

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her, she would have preferred above all things a bent toward literature. But neither my high-school compositions nor my college essays showed any touch above youthful mediocrity. Having as much religion in her as befitted a lady of her time, Mother would have tolerated the church; but for that also I showed no inclination. Neither did business attract me; and Mother, I know now, was grateful for that. The establishment which formed the foundation of our prosperities offered no openings save a clerkship and a long wait for superiors to die. Even so, it would run better without me. The law, in that day, was the catch-all for educated but unspecialized talent, and the gateway to politics. For no better reason I know now than that it seemed to settle this perplexing question, I was "thinking of the law."

I passed the summer in Cohasset, trying to inhibit thought of the future; a pleasant period on the surface, but below that vaguely unsatisfactory. Those were the days when sport was just coming in. At Harvard we had a crew and a baseball team of desultory training-habits; and, just about the year of my matriculation, football had passed from aimless kicking about the Yard to study of the Rugby rules. But beyond the gates of the university, that sporting-habit which we have since borrowed from the British had not yet begun to sweeten and sanitize the life of the leisure class. We played croquet—a game I learned in time to loathe. We boated in a leisurely and sociable fashion; we bathed on Cohasset Beach; we rode a great deal—in English saddles but without posting to the trot. For the rest, life was a round of balls and dances, whist or euchre-parties, tableaux, formal calls with my mother in the stiff family barouche. It was all only a continuation, really, of my three college vacations; except that Mother, now that I was out in the world, demanded from me a larger measure of what she called social responsibility.

Some salt was lacking from life. I sought excitement in a flirtation, which came near to being an entanglement, with Nellie Ferris—*petite*, plump, as was then the fashion in women,

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delicately featured, dowered with an active little mind and an acute little wit. I suppose that if I had remained in Cohasset, proximity would have done its full work. As it was, the affair never went further than kissing good-bye when I started West. We corresponded, yes. But now her last letter, a month old and cold when it arrived, still lay unanswered in my saddle-bag.

I was reading one night by the student-lamp in the library and Mother was writing letters at the escritoire in the corner, when I looked up to find her eyes fixed on me with an expression hard yet quizzical. I retain yet a picture of her as she looked that night. She was forty-five. In that era, a woman of her years had long anticipated the inevitable, given up bright colours and such youthful fripperies as croquet and sea-bathing, and was preparing for her era of caps and knitting. I thought of her, from the viewpoint of twenty-two, as incredibly aged. Yet, as she sat there facing me, her chestnut-brown hair, dressed in the innumerable waves and small curls of current fashion, showed no thread of white. She had full, wide-open grey eyes; between them the bridge of her nose ran high, yet so delicate that the lamplight seemed to render it almost transparent. Mother always said that her mouth was her worst feature. The age demanded of mouths that they be small and very red; a rosebud was the standard of comparison. Whereas Mother's was wide, though full enough in the lips a little tight in the corners, and of a delicate coral-pink. Had she lived in this day, Mother's mouth would have come into its own; it was born a half-century too soon.

For the rest, Mother, as she sat there on the ridiculous little gold chair of her escritoire, seemed all billows and cascades. The old lace of her Sunday finery foamed about her throat and bosom. From a tight and corseted bodice billowed and cascaded the innumerable folds of a corded brown silk skirt, overlaid with row after row of trimmings. From somewhere amidst a foam of lace, one of her plump but shapely forearms supported a tapered hand which was tapping a pen-holder against her lips. Her other hand lay stretched out on

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the desk toward me in an attitude which merely hinted at affection. Mother's affection ran so deeply that she expressed them with difficulty. We New Englanders are still very near in spirit to Old England; and we show it in nothing so much as in our shy repression of our deepest emotions.

"Rob," said my mother, "what do you propose to do next?"

"Enter law school in the fall," I replied. Not until I expressed it in that bald manner did I realize how little the law really interested me.

"And then?" pursued my mother, continuing to tap her penholder against her tightened lips.

"Oh, practise, I suppose. Somewhere."

"Somewhere," repeated my mother dryly. "And somehow. Rob, does that vague prospect allure you?"

"No," said I, jerked suddenly into frankness with her and with myself. "No, it doesn't."

Mother nodded. "I thought so!"

Her eyes were bright. When Mother's eyes looked so, it meant one of two things. Either she was experiencing some emotion which her shyness kept her from expressing, or she was about to drop one of her dry, cutting witticisms. You had to know Mother intimately even to guess what she was feeling; just as you have to know horses a long time before you understand that when your steed breathes gently upon you from widened nostrils, he is petting you.

And suddenly my lazy young mind stirred and began to function with realities. I knew why life in Cohasset had seemed so flat, and why my mind—not through fear but through boredom—had been refusing to picture the future. Tilden, during that all-night talk in Harrison's room, had planted in me a seed more vital than either of us knew. It had been germinating all this time. Now, suddenly, it sprouted to the surface. And——

"Mother, I think I want to go West," I said.

She kept her eyes on mine, but there was a break in her voice as she replied:

"Not for good?"

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"Oh, no!" said I. "Just for a year or so." Then I walked to the window, lest she see what might be in my face; stood looking out at the lights of Cohasset Harbor.

Mother spoke very gently from behind me:

"I had thought of every possibility but that. I was about to suggest that you go to sea for a while—my tribe, away back, were seafaring people. It's far from genteel, the West."

Her inference that the forecastle of a deep-sea vessel stood notable for an atmosphere of gentility amused me, so that I dared turn back from the window and show my face.

"But there's steel in you," said Mother—now she was looking down into the pigeonholes of her old mahogany desk—"though it's never been tempered yet—and some generations of gentlemen. No, Rob, you'll come through that. Of course, there's—danger. Dreadful things happen out there." Mother had never in her life travelled west of Albany, and had formed her picture from the newspapers.

"I'll risk that!" said I, my youthful pride in my own courage slightly piqued.

"That's true," replied Mother. "I said you had steel in you. Perhaps for me it isn't so easy."

Then Mother did what she had not done since I was a little boy. She had always kissed me perfunctorily at meeting and parting. But now she held out her arms to me. I came to her; and she patted and petted me silently. I looked up presently, to see that she was crying without sobs or sniffles—just the big tears coursing down her cheeks. I wiped her eyes and—

"I won't go if you feel that way about it," I said. Whereupon she became at once her old, peppery self. She snatched the handkerchief away from me, finished the drying-process, and jerked out:

"Don't be a fool, Robert."

So we sat down and planned it all out practically. I remembered something Tilden had said during that conversation in Holworthy Hall—"You don't get that sort of thing in California any more. We're growing civilized. Nowadays, the

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real wild life is in the Rockies. People are just beginning to break into them." Offhand and without further thought, I chose the Rockies. Then came the matter of funds. And there my mother became steel and adamant. If my wander-years were going to do me any good, she said, I must pay my own way. She would get me out there. She would get me back, if necessary. And, in any event, I must not stay more than two years. This at first both hurt and piqued me; I had pictured myself leaping from adventure to adventure, without thought of the morrow and always with plenty in my pockets. The cold, hard reality of making a living had not entered into my dreams of the West. But by the time I had slept on the matter, I perceived dimly that the true adventure must be sweetened with practical effort; otherwise it is all plums and no suet. And I accepted Mother's conditions.

Of course, I missed the deeper realities of her decision, as youth always does. I had to let maturity and experience ripen my own understanding before I could appreciate the fullness of her sacrifice to the development of my character. It took a woman of her breed and time to do it. Others would merely have thought of it, or would have pulled back at the last moment. Mother played the game through. I am not certain, however, that her motives were entirely unmixed. Mother had been watching my affair with Nellie Ferris; I know that now. On the surface, no one could possibly object to Nellie. Her family was an irreproachable pillar of our social set. She had been finished in the most proper schools; she had in reasonable and genteel degree all the accomplishments. Had she been vulgar or sensual or ill-tempered or even poor, Mother might have raised logical objections to the match. As it was—what could she say? Mother, I suppose, had perceived the hollow-woodenness behind that smooth, round, fashionably low forehead of Nellie's.

Only when I reached Denver did Mother seem to repent a little of her bargain with herself and me. From her first letter dropped a money-order for three hundred dollars.

"I am sending this so," she wrote, "because I am not sure

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there are banks out there. You are not to spend it now. I know, of course, that you will follow my wishes. It is just a reserve in case you are in trouble or for any other unexpected contingency."

But I did not at first follow the trail of adventure clear through. Denver was the railroad terminus; last thrust of the civilization I knew. Then, as now, it stood gateway to the Rockies. Established in a cheap hotel down by the Union Station, with fifty dollars in my pocket and the world before me, I spent two days acclimating my lungs to the rarefied atmosphere and my spirit to these entertaining new surroundings, before I counted my money and thought of my material situation.

The *Rocky Mountain News* displayed columns of advertisements under the heading "Help Wanted." I ran them over—"teamsters"—"railroad construction gangs"—"shovel men"—"miners." My eye grasped at this item. I took the matter to the clerk at our hotel, my bureau of information on all things Western. I found that "miner" meant not a romantic prospector, following the trail of fortune, but virtually a common labourer in the dark bowels of the earth. I was surprised to find no advertisements for cowboys, until that same mentor and guide informed me that round-up was now nearly finished and the ranches were letting out men, not taking them on; and anyhow, he added with the trace of a smile at the corners of his lips, the cattle business didn't advertise much. I inspected the row of dingy employment agencies fringing the station. Tanned, sun-wrinkled men with hard faces, dressed in overalls, old tattered coats and flopping grey felt hats, loafed, hands in pockets, against the walls, or crouched on their haunches along the edge of the gutter. They were always conversing in subdued tones; when I approached them, they watched me with hard, steady eyes. At the windows, stencilled notices on pine boards announced demand for "25 graders"—"20 miners"—"50 construction hands"—the same unromantic common labour. Two days more, during which I hesitated and

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grew bored with inspecting the town; then the "Male Help Wanted" column in the *Rocky Mountain News* began to shrink, and the signs to disappear from before the employment offices. Also, there was now no haze on the westerly mountains; their summits cleft the sky as cleanly as though they were drawn in dark green and white on blue paper; and the cottonwoods and aspens of the river-bottoms gave in lemon and russet a pale imitation of our Eastern maples. These phenomena were not uncorrelated, as I learned from my friend the clerk.

"Everybody's knockin' off for winter in the mines and ranches," he said. "All come pilin' into Denver." And I began to perceive that Mother and I, in our innocence of a world beyond the Hudson, had timed all wrong my venture into the world.

My face must have shown my spurt of dismay, for the clerk suddenly asked:

"You're educated, ain't you?"

"Yes," said I; and inhibited myself from saying how much I was educated. "College breeding," I had found already, did not recommend a young man in the Far West.

"If you hustle out there quick," said the clerk, "you can get a checking-job in the grading-gang out by Longmount. Friend of mine had it. Happen to know he's quitting to-day."

"Checking?" I asked.

"Keepin' time on the gang. Hiring and firing—mostly firing nowadays," said the clerk.

I drove out to Longmount in a rented livery buckboard; making no more of a small matter, I got the job, buckled down to it with all the interest in the world. With the boss, a taciturn and cynical old Westerner whom I never came really to know, I "batched" in a board-shack. Uncommunicative as he was, he did teach me something about that essential Western art, shooting. He himself handled a 45-calibre Colt's with such magic efficiency as to make me suspect that his silence concealed a past. The autumn rains came; there were light snows in the

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heights above, and they spread over the peaks a bridal veil which with each succeeding storm grew heavier. When it had become a blanket of snow, we finished our job and paid off; our force of stalwart Irishmen and Swedes repaired to Denver to "blow in" most of their accumulated wages at the dance-halls or small gambling-houses of Holiday Street, and to drag out for the rest of the winter a desultory existence at odd jobs. I too was out of work, and I had but forty dollars ahead. Then luck served me another good turn. Settling up our business with Reichmann, the German grocer from whom we drew our commissary, I found that he needed a clerk. Now my relations with Reichmann had been scarcely cordial. The boss believed that Reichmann swindled us about twice a week; but he handed over to me the task of pressing our claims for reduction of the bills. It had been a running fight. When with considerable inner hesitance I applied to Reichmann for this job, I expected him to laugh. To my surprise, Reichmann said, after one grim look into my face:

"Well, I guess you'll do."

Reichmann, it appeared later, had admired, even while he quarrelled, my devotion to the interests of my employer. He never knew that the boss was responsible for that. So next morning I was weighing sugar and learning to wrap bundles; and had found on Curtis Street a modest boarding-place.

There I remained all winter. Denver, in those days, interested me; but, after all, it was not the West I had come to see and to live. In the bourgeois circles which I came to frequent, life did not vastly differ, save for a little newness and crudity, from that of the New England town I had left behind. We danced; we went on straw-rides to Golden or Bear Creek; we exhibited ourselves in tableaux. Principally, the difference showed in a freedom of manners, and in the haziness of social lines. True, there lay by the tracks a red-light district of saloons, of cribs, of bawdy-houses and of gambling-palaces which New England would never have tolerated. But that, after all, was only the scum of the West; a few slumming visits satisfied my curiosity.

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The West I wanted lay beyond that white mountain barrier. As I watched its summits blazing to rose in the trail of winter sunsets, I felt sometimes that it might lift like a curtain, revealing the unimaginably beautiful drama of the True Adventure. And wherever I met men and women—customers at Reichmann's store, transient guests of the boarding-house, intimates or acquaintances at dances or sociables or sleigh-rides—I heard tales which out-dazzled those of Tilden in that long night at Holworthy.

When spring came, I would go—somewhere. It descended upon us suddenly, bringing the cottonwoods to bud overhead, mushing to an impenetrable morass the unpaved roadways underfoot. And, sharp on that, the *Rocky Mountain News* splashed across its first page the story of a strike at Cottonwood, which I knew as a mining-camp, but recently opened, somewhere up in the ranges. Not only were the miners panning "unprecedented sums" from the creek-bed, but they had found a "gold quartz proposition" which might be the mother lode. There were hints, even, of other discoveries in other metals. "Anything," said the *News* editorially, "may be found in this new Golconda. The riches of the Rockies have not as yet been scratched." So I closed out with Reichmann, who nearly wept to see me abandon a good job for the illusory business of mining, and went with my winter savings to Pledsted's, jumping-off place for the dash across the peaks. I intended to proceed by stage. Next neighbour on the floor of a big tent which served as a lodging-house, I met Buck, breakfasted with him, reviewed the prospect of reaching Cottonwood in time to stake a decent claim, became intrigued with his honesty, his charily revealed experience, his technical knowledge of his business. Buck was just out of a partner, one Shorty, who had come down with him from Idaho, having fallen before the wiles of woman and taken himself a wife in Denver. Hesitantly I made bold to propose that we join forces, adding that I had a little money. For this contingency, I felt, justified me in dipping into my mother's emergency fund. Buck accepted with a promptness which in him

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amounted to eagerness. So, a day later, we were toiling behind our jack-trains toward Cottonwood.

This digging along Bear Creek was, therefore, my first encounter with actual, hard, physical work. And when the fascination of golden sand began to pall, I realized that man does not by choice toil with the sweat of his face, but by hard necessity. He must discipline himself to work with his hands; life had not given me that form of discipline. At first unconsciously, then consciously, I began to loaf. When Buck's back was turned I stood long minutes at a time, contemplating the mountains or trying to peer round the opaque corner of the hill at Cottonwood Camp. I invented chores. An hour ahead of the event, I was waiting for Buck's cheerful "Well, better lay off and clean up, kid."

And about the fourth day we found the clear, white bottom of the stream-bed streaked with another kind of sand, troublesome to shovel and almost impossible to rock and wash. In colour a dirty yellowish white, in substance it resembled very hard sugar. Its heavy particles, enamel-surfaced and shiny like those of ordinary bottom-sand, were yet extremely brittle. They ground under pressure into a cutting powder as hard as emery. A dozen times that day, we were forced to stop work and scrape this disturbing substance from the riffles of our washer. And when we cleaned up an experimental pan, we found not a streak of gold. Disgusted, Buck pulled up stakes and moved operations to the other bank. His reward, which quite restored his drooping spirits, was a good day's yield. All day he had been cursing the strange substance. That night, however, he forgave it sufficiently to scoop up a double handful and inspect it by the light of our candle.

"Damn college-bred mining expert might think he saw something in this here stuff," he remarked.

"What, for example?" I asked.

"Oh, most anything that come into his mind, I guess. What a mining expert looks for ain't value. All he needs is a sucker."

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Saturday afternoon brought the longest hours of my life. To my indescribable relief, Buck gave, even before the sun had dipped below the western range, the signal for quitting-time. We cleaned up the rocker, cooked a hasty supper. I bathed, shivering, in the creek, shaved, put on my single clean shirt and that suit of store-clothes which I had unpacked and hung up in the vain hope that some of its creases would disappear. Buck washed his face and neck, brushed his bristly, unruly brown hair, wiped the mud from his boots with a gunny-sack, and let it go at that. So walking with eager haste through the deepening twilight, we plunged into the joyous, confused babble of Saturday night in camp.

CHAPTER VII

MARCUS INSTRUCTS IN JOURNALISM

COTTONWOOD CAMP, in the five days since we left for our claim, had grown like an exhalation. That hill-top assigned to be its residence district blazed with bonfires and with the glitter, through tent-doors, of kerosene lamps or candles. On the day of our departure, the floored tents and foundations had but sparsely dotted its slopes. Now they lay so thick that I found myself unable to identify Mrs. Barnaby's boarding-house. Evidently the inhabitants had combined to bring order out of chaos. The tents had fallen into the conventional gridiron pattern of an American town; lights glinted through the unwall'd frames of board shacks. Piles of lumber and boxes of general merchandise cluttered the streets; between these obstacles wove an unchecked stream of booted men, all making in the one direction. In the claims, prospect-holes and embryo El Dorados enfolded by these mountains, miner and labourer, teamster and prospector, had done even as Buck and I—cleaned up washers and persons, supped early, started briskly for the delights of Saturday night in camp. On the edge of the hill rose a tent bigger than any other I had ever seen. Its sign, illuminated by a bonfire, bore the legend:

"ST. LOUIS LODGING-HOUSE
SLEEPS \$2 PER NIGHT."

The two-story building which housed the Black Jack was still the most imposing structure on Main Street. However, the vacant lots which, when I saw this thoroughfare last, had

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interspersed cabin, tent and board-shack, were now filled up with other cabins, tents and shacks. Clear at the end of the street rose a tent rivalling in proportions those of the St. Louis Lodging-House. Its sign, illuminated not by a bonfire but by a screened lamp, read:

"SIEGEL'S BEER-HALL
SCHOONERS 25 CENTS."

"Beer!" exclaimed Buck. "Say, a beer would go good!" We pushed through the canvas door. Siegel, in his haste to get custom, had not taken the trouble to floor his tent. Along the farther end ran two long tables, each bearing kegs. Bartenders in blue shirts, working like mad while the harvest lasted, were drawing full steins, setting them forth along the tables, making change, chucking the receipts into a box. In the foreground, Siegel himself was washing schooners in a tub of villainously brown water. And the crowd before the tables milled like cattle for a chance at the beverage which is the special solace of overworked tissues. This new attraction had drawn women of both classes—a knot of miners' wives with shawls over their heads, two daring ladies of fashion—as fashion went in Cottonwood—betraying embarrassment by suppressed giggles, four butterflies of the underworld, bare-headed and with dolmans or fur sacks over their garish, short-skirted dresses. Beer is bulky; but Siegel, in getting the first consignment over the passes and adding to his profit the excessive cost of freighting, had reckoned shrewdly.

We got to the tables at last; our foaming beers stood before us and Buck was in the act of paying, when a hand shot from behind under his arm, seized his schooner. I wheeled. A man as short and squatty as some marine monster stood drinking Buck's beer. Over the rim of the schooner shone a pair of black eyes that glistened humorously; and his marine resemblance was pointed by a moustache, now flecked with foam, which drooped above an aggressive chin like that of a sea-lion. Buck's eyes snapped with resentment; then his expression changed and he broke into a string of expletives which

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I cannot here transcribe. "——Shorty, you hamstrung old hoss, you!" it ended.

"Same to you and many of 'em!" replied Shorty, removing from his lips the empty glass and wiping the foam from his moustache with the back of his hand.

"Staked yet?" he inquired.

"Hell, yes!" replied Buck. "After you went back on me, I throwed in with this kid tenderfoot here—kid, shake hands with Shorty."

"Put her thar, kid!" said Shorty, but though his language was hearty, his manner was perfunctory; his keen black eyes scarcely left Buck's face.

"Big thing?" he asked.

"Looks like pay dirt."

"Shoot! A placer proposition!"

"Only proposition that is! Did you bring your woman along?"

"Ain't any woman's far's I'm concerned," replied Shorty, his countenance for the first time almost serious, "or won't be soon's I've raised the wind for a divorce. She was a——" Here Shorty dropped an Anglo-Saxon noun describing without shadow or equivocation the oldest profession.

"Thought so," said Buck. "I told you, out of my knowledge and experience. I got married once up in the Idaho diggings——" And here, while I waited breathless for the rest, Buck as usual slid off the surface of the narrative and returned to practical affairs.

"What ye got against placer?" he inquired.

"Bigger fish," replied Shorty. "How long you been vegetatin' on your placer claim? Don't you read the news?" From the capacious pocket of his woolly overcoat, Shorty produced a folded newspaper, opened its grimy creases. "THE COTTONWOOD COURIER," it was headed. And I realized how much we had missed; and also the enterprise of Marcus Handy. Hazily, I had catalogued the first appearance of the first newspaper in camp as an event of the distant future. But there it was already—Volume 1, Number 2—its front page a worn

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and ill-aligned patchwork of scare-heads. Or what were scare-heads for those days. The main item, indeed, ran clear across two columns, and began:

"Latest Find Rich Beyond Calculation

Cottonwood Camp, Crown City of the Rockies,
Does It Again

Unlimited Wealth Pours into Laps of
Lucky Locators on Liverpool Hill

It's Gold Quartz This Time, but They're Striking
Everything. 'Greatest Camp That Ever Was,'
Say Experienced Mining Men!"

"Gold quartz!" commented Shorty. "Maybe the mother lode that your little tailings come from."

"Well, 'tain't a poor man's proposition," remarked Buck. "Them lucky locators is working for Wall Street. Staked anything for yourself?"

"Nope, just got here."

"Anything in sight?"

"There's a hundred-dollar bill buried somewhere on me," answered Shorty. "Find it on me, and it's yours. It's all she left me."

"I guess, pardner," said Buck, "you wish to hell you'd stayed with me."

"I wish to hell I had."

The look which Buck flashed back at Shorty was a herald of destiny. Had not Buck dropped that little, hesitant flutter of the eyelids, had I not caught it on the wing, the future might have run very differently for all three of us. It expressed—was it regret of his bargain? On the one hand there stood I, an unseasoned tenderfoot of little use in gold-washing; on the other, his old and tried partner. Yet he was bound to me by ties of law and honour; and Buck was not the man to edge out of a bargain. He could not know how much, at that

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moment, I wanted to edge out of it myself. The sight of the camp, of human beings in aggregation, had further sickened me with my hard lot on Placer Claim Number 32.

It flashed on me that Buck and Shorty wanted to be alone; that if they could talk it over they might come to closer agreement with the outcome which I desired. And there in my hands was my excuse.

"I met the editor of this paper coming across Ludlow's Pass," I broke in. "And I promised to look him up."

"All right, kid," replied Buck, with a readiness which piqued me, in spite of my deeper desires. "Guess I'll be somewhere round camp until late."

So forth I went, to search for Marcus Handy and the *Cottonwood Courier*. When I first saw it a week before, I had thought of Main Street as crowded. Now it ran brimful. The older establishments had constructed rough board sidewalks before their doors. These accommodated but inadequately the swollen crowd. The overflow splashed through the mud of the roadway, disputing passage with half-stalled freight-wagons. The babble of the crowd struck the ear like some joyous staccato passage in music; a symphony of hope. Out of it, now and then, cracked the bassoon oaths of a freighter or the raucous disharmony of wanton female laughter. Then from a long board-shack sounded the preliminary roll of a drum, and a band struck up. I jostled to the doorway. Already miners in heavy top-boots were swinging women in scandalously short skirts through the jerky measures of a polka. Next door had blossomed, since my last visit, the pioneer jewellery-store of Arnstein & Cohen. They had fitted into the front of a small log-cabin a smaller bay-window. There the gleam of two reflector-lamps illuminated the richest of their stock—a five-caret diamond stud; rings which flaunted the national colours in rubies, diamonds and sapphires; gold watch-chains heavy enough to snake logs; gold watches carved with designs of locomotives, trotting-horses or steers' heads; pearl-handled, silver-plated revolvers. Against the rough boards backing this display lounged a little, young, pale-faced

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man, holding carelessly in a drooping hand a drawn 45-calibre Colt's. As though advertising the business, a big, yellow diamond stud was screwed into the space between two upper buttons of his blue flannel shirt. From which I deduced that Arnstein & Cohen had as yet no safe.

Next door a board shack which was merely a frame when last I saw the camp, had achieved the finish of walls and a large show-window. Within, the carcasses of deer—bucks, does and fawns alike—hung in a row by their heels. In a corner, a man with sleeves rolled up over gory arms was painfully stripping the resistant hide from a magnificent silver-tip bear. Dressed chickens lay piled in one corner; in the other, a butcher with flowing side-whiskers was chopping up a side of beef on a section of pine-log.

Now the band of another dance-hall struck up; now a street-musician with a violin; now a banjo and guitar from the Black Jack. Main Street blared music—conflicting, inharmonious—which drowned all other sounds except the clumping of heavy boots on the board side-walks.

A blob of light above the roadway drew me up a side-street. It illuminated, I saw presently, a board-shack leaning against a log-cabin. I looked again; and there stood the object of my search. An illumination, such as I had seen carried in political processions, proclaimed that this was the morning *Courier*, Pioneer Newspaper of Cottonwood.

The main cabin, like nine-tenths of the buildings in Cottonwood, had not yet achieved the luxury of a regular wooden door. In its place hung like a portière the conventional gunny-sack. I pushed through this; to my nostrils came a scent pungent and pleasing, but strange—printer's ink. Among the details of a cluttered interior, my eye caught first the central group. At a printer's stone just large enough to hold two forms stood Marcus Handy in overalls, splashed with ink and grease, hammering a block out of a galley. In one corner fumed a hot sheet-iron stove. The shack beyond revealed the figure of a fourteen-year-old boy, tinkering with Marcus Handy's precious flat-bed press. Beneath it, their heads

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propped on a pile of white print-paper, lay two other boys, even smaller, sound asleep. These, I was afterward to learn, served as substitute for the boiler which Marcus Handy hoped to get some day from Denver. When press-time came, they would turn the great crank which revolved the flywheel. To one side of the room in which I stood, rows of printer's cases lay so close to the stone that two ancient printers, furiously setting type, constantly bumped the boss. On the other side was a pine table, littered with newspapers, proofs, scattered sheets; all weighted down by a double-barrelled derringer. A block and roller, at which a small and extremely dirty boy was drawing proofs, occupied most of the remaining floor space.

Marcus Handy jerked up at me a nervous eye. "For God's sake, don't——" he began, and then: "Oh, the tenderfoot!" He rested in position for an instant, his wooden mallet poised, and I saw that the lines of his face were drawn and his eyes bloodshot. "Were you fooling when you said you had a college education?"

"The best and most complete education that Harvard University dispenses or affords," I said, taking up, where we had left it off on Ludlow's Pass, our Western game of chaff and rhetoric; "polished, refined——" but Handy broke that off with a gesture, as though the situation were too serious for humour.

"God Almighty must have sent you to reward me for the one good deed I ever did, which I don't know what it is," said he. "A printer's got drunk and run out on me, and the paper ain't half written. Don't say you're doing anything to-night. Just grab a pencil and a handful of that copy-paper over there, and bring it here!" Even as he spoke, he had hammered out the block; and when I had obeyed, fascinated, and turned back to him, he was lifting with careful fingers a stick of type.

"Take notes on this, and when you've taken them, sit down there and put them into the English language," he added, never looking up from his work. "And don't stop to get any

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of your college grammar into it, either. There was a fire this morning up in White Mule Gulch. Got two cabins on a claim. Name of claim, Jennie June. Name of owners, John Ferguson and Ad Woolwich. Got that down?" Marcus had now filled out his column and set in the rules. "All right. Two hundred words. Work in something about needing a city government to afford fire protection and head it: 'Fire Fiend Strikes Again!' But anyhow, hurry. Wait a minute. You can carry two items in your head as well as one, can't you? All right. Make three lines of this: John W. Hansen held up on Liverpool Hill. Relieved of \$175 and his watch. Three or four lines of that. Head it: 'For the Hold-up Record,' and ring the head. Rush 'em both—they're needed to fill out this page—and then I'll give you the big story!"

As I sat down to the table and shoved papers and derringer away to give myself writing-room, I had a spurt of amusement at the unconventionality of the proceeding. I glanced up at Marcus again, and amusement yielded to sympathy and understanding. The early appearance of the *Cottonwood Courier* had been no miracle, unless a miracle of hard work. In less than a week, Marcus had got his plant set up and his newspaper out; and I conjectured that he was as yet its whole editorial and business staff. Which accounted for his odd, almost drunken appearance. He was working by the light of his own blazing nerves.

"Rush it!" he called twice, as I set down my plain tale. Having finished, I handed over the sheets to him, somewhat thrilled at the prospect of seeing myself for the first time in print. He did not even glance at my copy, but yelled to a printer: "Get this out as soon as the Lord'll let you!" and added in an aside to me: "It goes as written. If you've run any Latin quotations or dirty cracks into this stuff, I'll tear the sheepskin off your college-bred hide. Now—" he was lifting and arranging type again—"this reading-item goes on the front page for a lead. Start it about this way: 'Mysterious hold-ups for large sums have grown entirely too common in camp of late. We do not refer to picayune affairs where a tender-

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foot parts with his roll. The boys must have their fun. But hard upon two robberies of the stages came the affair at Black Cañon, and yesterday the gang, for the same gang it must be, attempted the boldest crime yet perpetrated.'—Do you think you can get that down about the way I said it?"

"I think so," I faltered.

"Well, take a note or two, can't you?" When I looked up, Marcus was locking his completed page.

"All ready?" he proceeded. "Write the rest of it your own way. Here's the facts. Stonewall Jackson mine up on Liverpool sends down a messenger to Cottonwood in a buckboard for the payroll. Probably about five thousand dollars." Here Marcus carefully lifted one end of his form, punched it viciously with his fingers to see if it held, began wetting it down with a sponge. "He don't take any chances of being seen at the bank. Gets a business man on Main Street—don't know who—to draw the money for him. Then, at the last minute, something makes him ringy. Just an instinct, I guess. He ends up by sending the money in the saddle-bags of the boss; and he rides alone, with a sawed-off shotgun on the seat for a blind. Sure enough, he's held up. Four men, masked. They go through him and see they've been fooled. One of 'em's for torturing him, Indian fashion, to make him tell what's become of the payroll, but the rest lose their sand. So they kick him once or twice for luck and vamoose. Broad daylight proposition. He comes down to notify the police and lets go of the facts to me at the Black Jack this afternoon. Make the story of the hold-up an interview with him. And get it dramatic. Go strong on the minute when he's facing the prospect of hellish torment. His name's Henry—there, I'll be damned if I remember what the rest of it is. Call it Smith for the present. Finish up by drawing strong attention to the fact that someone in camp must be systematically peaching——"

"Peaching?" I interposed; for that verb, now almost forgotten in the progress of our American language, was then new slang.

"Informing—watching shipments of money for the gang.

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It's plain to me as the nose on your face. Some of the gambling element, maybe. And make an appeal for a strong, pure, municipal government. That's all—no, wait a minute——” Marcus lifted his form with a weary grunt, set it down on the floor, leaned it carefully against the wall, and rested his hands on the stone as he meditated. “No, drop that. Don't even hint about confederates in camp. Or politics either. I want to know more before I cut loose. Now get it written!”

The fourteen-year-old boy whom I had seen feeding the fire in the lean-to, proved to be the pressman. As I settled down to write, he came and took the form away; I could hear him tinkering with the platen. Marcus seized a stick, began with irregular, jerky movements setting type. I learned afterwards that he was composing his leading editorial on the future of Cottonwood Camp.

Looking up occasionally from the frantic haste of my labours, I noted absently that men were constantly passing and repassing through the canvas door and talking with Marcus as he worked. One, evidently, had brought in an advertisement. Just as evidently, Marcus had told him to write it himself; for he seated himself at the table opposite me and, with a protruding tongue-tip following the course of his pencil, set himself to the labour of literary creation. Another must have borne news, for presently Marcus called to me:

“You, kid! Name of the messenger's Henry Seward. They took seven dollars off him. He left his gold watch in camp when he started his bluff. Put that in—contrast between what they expected and what they got.”

I finished; hesitatingly set the copy on the case before Marcus. He ran rapidly, professionally, through the sheets. “Nine hundred words or thereabouts,” he said. “Couldn't have guessed better at space myself. Let's look at your college-bred English. Yep, I thought so! ‘Anticipated the instinctive movement of the messenger toward his weapon.’ What's the matter with ‘got the drop on him’? Huh?” Holding the paper against the back of a stick, Marcus fairly slashed in this correction. “Yes, there's another piece of Harvard grammar.

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And there's another." Again he corrected, in a square, plain hand, with curious lines over and under certain letters. "But it'll do."

A moment before, I had been thrilled with the prospect of seeing myself in print. Now I experienced another literary emotion. I bridled at this criticism. And, for the first time, I asserted myself.

"Well, I didn't ask to write it!" I said.

Marcus turned upon me his bloodshot eye.

"Hurt, huh!" said he. "Well, I haven't acted grateful, seeing's you've just walked in and saved my life, that's a fact! Now I'll show my gratitude and appreciation practically, just for a change. I can use you. I've been wanting a reporter. If you like the job, sit down and go on with it—at twenty a week. What say?"

My breath taken away by the dramatic suddenness of his proposal, I realized that here lay my way out. The smell of printer's ink was already perfume to my nostrils. I had enjoyed this little whirl at intellectual work—the thing I was trained to do—as much as I had loathed digging on the claim. If Shorty would only buy me out—— With a promptness which equalled that of Marcus, I answered:

"Give me an hour, and I'll let you know."

"Well, come back anyhow—need you to-night!" exclaimed Marcus as I darted through the door to search for Buck and Shorty.

CHAPTER VIII

A BUSINESS DEAL BETWEEN FRIENDS

I PUSHED and jostled my way from Siegel's Beer-Hall to the Black Jack, from the Black Jack to Myers' Variety Theatre, where at last I found my two adventurers lolling expansively on a back seat, Buck's arm hooked over Shorty's shoulder. They, in common with the rest of the audience, were listening with heads sentimentally askew to "The Blue Alsatian Mountains," as rendered, to the accompaniment of a guitar, a violin and the only piano in camp, by a hawk-faced woman in short and ruffy skirts. She finished; wild applause was punctuated by a metallic clang as a silver dollar sailed over the audience and landed accurately at her feet. Followed a shower of silver and even of gold. The lady, making pretty pantomime of modest confusion, picked up the pieces as they fell and dropped them into the pockets of her jaunty apron. I had to wait until she rendered two encores before I could announce to Buck and Shorty that I wanted to see them on important business and drag them to the recess between the Variety and Cheap Jack Eckstein's Dry Goods Emporium. And there I wasted no time with preliminaries, but plunged straight into business.

"Shorty," I said—I had never heard any other name for him, "do you want to buy out my share of our claim?"

It was Buck who answered. He looked upon me with a startled eye, which grew a little suspicious as he asked:

"What's the game? Got anything better in sight?"

"Nothing in mining," said I. "But I've been offered a job on the newspaper. And I want to take it."

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Shorty spoke; a slight difficulty in pronunciation proved that since I left him he had taken many drinks.

"Throwin' down your good old pardner, huh!" he exclaimed, truculently. "Double-cross him——"

"Shut up, Shorty!" commanded Buck. "This is a square kid. Only I want to see if he ain't a damn fool. Don't you know you're lettin' go of a mighty promising prospect?"

"I know you think so," I replied.

"Course," said Buck, with the flash of an understanding for which I had not given him credit, "you're plumb disgusted with diggin' just now. It's hard for a young fellow to get down to real work. But the first week's always the toughest. You'll——"

"Aw, come to the p'int!" exclaimed Shorty, waving slightly toward me as though to begin hostilities. "How much do you want to skin me for?"

"I don't want to skin you at all," said I, a little touched, spite of Shorty's condition. "Just what I put into it."

"Don't know's I can let you cheat yourself that way," said Buck, utterly ignoring, then and afterwards, the interpositions of his muddled friend. "Why don't you grub-stake Shorty? Then you'll have your share comin'——"

"Grub-stake, hell!" broke in Shorty. "No grub-stake in mine——"

"When we strike a pocket," concluded Buck. "And how's Shorty goin' to pay?"

"I'd rather not grub-stake anyone," said I, "and Shorty can pay me on the instalment plan, can't he?" I was growing eager; for our discussion had brought up in my mind the sickening memory of that last week in the ooze of the stream-bed; and the blisters on my hands still burned. I perceived, however, that my affair was going well. Buck had not denied that he wanted to combine with Shorty. Only, honest man that he was, he had tried to guard my interests.

"I've got a better chance with the *Courier*," I added. "Of course, I don't like——" and here I stopped, too shy by virtue of my youth and my origin to bring out the rest. I wanted to

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tell Buck that my only regret at selling Claim No. 32 was the thought of leaving him. Towards Buck I felt at that stage of my Western wanderings as a young soldier must feel toward a stern but benevolent and efficient superior officer. But Buck, it seemed, understood, for he replied in an unwontedly low voice:

"I'll be sorry to lose you, kid." And it was done; all excepting the process of getting logic into the muddled head of Shorty. Alternating force with tact, Buck accomplished that. Shorty had admitted ownership of a hundred dollars. He even drew it from its hiding-place in the back of his watch. I should have that to bind the bargain. I was to keep my horse and the personal articles of our equipment, and to take Shorty's note at three months for the remainder of the money we had put into our outfit—which had now been transmuted into our claim. That note Shorty was to pay off on the instalment plan from current yield. Having arranged the details of this simple transaction, having got momentarily, at least, the consent of the party of the second part, Buck and I hurried him to the Comstock Lode saloon. We managed to jam our way to the bar, gave Shorty a drink to keep him quiet, paid the harassed bartender four bits for a pen, ink and two sheets of paper. As the better-educated of the two competent persons, I was about to draw up the note and deed of transfer, when Shorty intervened.

"Nossir," he said, "you've got college education. No damn college-bred's goin' to run in any monkey-tricks on me."

So Buck took pen and paper and wrote in his scrawly hand at my dictation; which seemed entirely to satisfy Shorty. But he drew back at the last moment, glaring at me with a suspicious eye. Then his shoulders began to heave with suppressed laughter; he suddenly took the pen and appended the signature of Edward D. Croly to agreement and note. And, having handed back the paper, he let his laughter go.

"All right?" he inquired. "Look'z all right, don't it? Ain't worth paper'z written on. Note signed by drunken man ain't no good." Shorty's laughter became Homeric.

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"It's good in this case," remarked Buck dryly; and then he added in an aside to me:

"Better move on—expect you up for your stuff in the mornin'. I'll have your half of our output ready for you—share and share alike." I had actually forgotten the small detail of reward for my week's work.

Not in the least disturbed by Shorty's drunken remark about the note, I jostled back to the *Courier*. Marcus was still sticking type with jerky, maniacal speed.

"All right," I said, "I'll stay."

"All right," echoed Marcus. "Now move! I'm a hard boss, I am. Local news is awful slack. Hasn't been a single shooting, and it's Saturday night at that. Want three columns of telegraph stuff——"

"Telegraph?"

"Sure—news of the world. You'll find the Denver Friday morning papers and the Wednesday K. C. evening sheets there in the heap. Run through 'em and rewrite me a set of good-looking dispatches. If there's a hanging anywhere, play that up big for the main story. Probably won't be—Friday's the regular day for hangings. If you don't find one, see if there isn't some stuff about somebody who was going to be hung yesterday, and drop the trap on him just the same—chances against a last-hour reprieve are always slim and there's nobody to call our bluff. Stick in any snappy details that come into your mind. Next, give me a good strike anywhere, but make some comparison showing it's inferior to Cottonwood, the Crown City of the Rockies. Fill out with good murders, or lynchings if there are any. If anything happened in Congress, make three or four inches out of that, unless it's got to do with mining. And remember we're Republican, lock, stock and barrel. Treat the Democrats nasty."

I gathered the Denver papers to myself, and settled down to my job. However, ten minutes later Marcus, looking up as he transferred a stick of type to the stone, found me loafing and called:

"Rustle! What I want ain't literature, but speed!"

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Struggling with the creative problem of imagining how a man might deport himself on the scaffold, I had looked up to meditate. And my eye had caught on a sheet of proofs hooked to a leg of the stone. At its head was an advertisement for Mrs. Barnaby's Boarding-House and Restaurant, California and Aspen Streets; special attention to transients. At Marcus's rebuke I started unnecessarily; and as I bent to my work, I felt my cheeks burning.

CHAPTER IX

THE INSCRUTABLE MRS.

DEANE

MARCUS, on bidding me good night, had added that Sunday was a day off for the whole staff excepting maybe him; and he didn't know but that even he was going to get the big sleep. I had found in the meantime that my duties on the *Courier*, like his, were not to be wholly literary. When the last news-filler had passed into type, I helped wash the forms, carry them into the pressroom, fasten them on to the platens. As soon as the somewhat jerky old press, at the furious impulsion of the two boys, began to knock off passably fair impressions, all spare hands set to folding—Marcus on the stone, I on our editorial table, the little printer's devil on the floor. But not before I had retired into a corner with one of the early, dim copies and read myself for the first time in print.

The pressman served for the time being as circulation manager; at six o'clock in the morning, the newsboys, recruited by Marcus from the youth of the camp, would pay him five cents a copy for our finished product, and sell it at ten cents—or anything more they could get. Next week, the boss remarked in one of his asides, he was going to find a solicitor and establish a subscription list. He added that he'd better be quick about it; the sheet hadn't begun to pay yet, and that sulphurously qualified paper company in Denver had no bowels of mercy. Marcus was drawing now on the false, hysterical strength which is the final stage of weariness. He talked incessantly of scattered, uncorrelated things; repeatedly he

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dropped his folding to begin on some unnecessary chore, which in turn he abandoned suddenly, resuming his work at the stone. I wondered, indeed, if he had not been drinking, until he remarked, apropos of nothing, that a shot of whisky would go great, but he hadn't dared even smell the stuff since he hit camp; if he once got started, he wouldn't know when to stop.

The papers finally folded, the two boys who furnished motive power at the flywheel put on their overcoats and went home; the pressman, pulling a blanket from a littered corner of the shack, rolled up in it on the iron bed of his machine to sleep until his newsboys should arrive. It was Marcus who recalled that I had no lodgings. "Sorry I can't bed you down," he added, "but I'm sleeping three in a room as it is. My cabin's just behind Siegel's Beer-Hall. If you're doing nothing to-day, come around about noon and rout me out. There's a lot of things I've had to leave at loose ends. You'd better go to the St. Louis Lodging-House—got any money? All right. They'll say they're full up. But you tell them I said they were to give you a bed. They've always got one up their sleeve, and seeing's they're squatters anyway, they fear the power of the press."

By now very tired myself, what with a night of mental work piled on to a day of physical, I trudged again down Main Street. It was three o'clock in the morning. The crowds had thinned out; but still the wooden side-walks gave back the reverberation of many feet. Only their beat had a different rhythm—an irregular staccato. Raucous, drunken whoops and voices in noisy argument rose above the steady hum of the crowds, the confused notes of band and orchestra.

The clerk of the St. Louis Lodging-House lay wrapped in a blanket just inside the flap of his tent, a dim lantern illuminating a drawn and unshaven face. He woke when I shook him, muttered, as expected, that he was full up, fell asleep, had again to be shaken awake before I could make him understand that I came from Marcus Handy and must have a bed. Then without a word he shed his covers, rose, stretched,

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yawned, took the lantern in one hand and a roll of blankets in the other, and led me to a tiny compartment with canvas walls. On the floor lay three men, snoring; between them and the wall a pile of hay afforded just space for one more. My nostrils, fresh from the pure air of a mountain night, bridled at a vile mixed scent of human effluvia, stale tobacco, staler whisky. The clerk unrolled my blankets, collected my two dollars, and was turning away, when a hair-raising scream in a male voice ran a prickling current across my scalp, caused the sleeper nearest me to wake, click his lips, and mutter drowsy, alarmed nothings.

"Damn drunk," remarked the clerk. "D.T.'s. Doctor's with him. Guess he's a goner." He vanished, leaving me in Stygian darkness to get off my outer garments and fumble my way into the blankets. Once more before utter weariness had its way with me, the scream of the demoniac brought me up sitting with my skin tingling and my hair tight. When next morning stirrings on all sides woke me and I shook out my clothes, dressed and emerged to the outer air, the first figure I encountered was a man in rough miner's clothes standing hat in hand, crossing himself. He was regarding an express wagon, into which the clerk and the driver were lifting a body wrapped in a blanket.

My morning spirits somewhat dampened, I made my toilet with such poor and soiled facilities as the St. Louis Lodging-House afforded—a tin wash-basin, encrusted round the edge, a roller-towel whereof only one hand's breadth was grey instead of black, a hairbrush from which the bristles were coming out in bunches, a stained whiskbroom, a piece of broken mirror. Some premonition of need had caused me, when I left the claim last night, to slip a clean collar into my overcoat-pocket. I put this on and started for breakfast at Mrs. Barnaby's boarding-house in a condition of Sabbath respectability. Never had I entertained the slightest doubt of where I intended to board in Cottonwood.

A light, sudden mountain rain had begun splashing the mud. I drew the collar of my overcoat about my clean linen,

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and hurried along through that newly plotted residence district. Its muddy streets were deserted now, except for a group of women splashing under the umbrellas to Mass. But the cabins were already streaming smoke, reverberating cheerful morning laughter. A half-finished frame-house concealed the approach to Mrs. Barnaby's establishment. It, too, sent up from its uncovered rafters a column of smoke which mushroomed against the rain. As I passed, I glanced through the gaping door-frame. At a sheet-iron stove in the corner, Mother stood under an umbrella, getting breakfast; at a table covered with a turkey-red cloth sat Father and the three children, also under umbrellas.

I pushed through the canvas flap of Mrs. Barnaby's, half expecting to find Mrs. Deane at the long table, wholly disappointed when I did not. Three nondescripts of the mines, their eyes on their tin plates, were wolfing ham and eggs and sucking down hot coffee. These, I learned later, were accidental transients. An open flap at the farther end of the tent revealed the old personage with side-whiskers, whom I had noticed unpacking boxes when I travelled to my late placer claim. He stood before a kitchen range which seemed wholly to fill the lean-to tent, rapidly pouring and turning flapjacks on an enormous griddle; and just then Mrs. Barnaby herself waddled in with a platter of steaming cakes in one hand and three tin cups, emitting breakfast odours, hooked fanwise into the other. She wore a long, gingham apron, not any too recently laundered, but her grey frizzes seemed just out of curl-papers; above her flushed, tanned and ruddy face they gave the effect of a silver crown.

"Hello!" she said, slapping the hot cakes before the three miners, who all reached for them simultaneously with their forks. "Didn't I see you at the hold-up?"

"Yes," I replied. "I wasn't held up, but I was there."

"Got us robbed," said Mrs. Barnaby, addressing the miners, "held up and robbed—that stage company!" Forthwith, addressing not me but them, Mrs. Barnaby launched forth into her narrative of that adventure, beginning with her mortal

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certainly, when she took the stage at Plested's, that something was going to happen. Meantime, I seated myself in a spare place at the other end of the table in the attitude of one who expects to be served. Mrs. Barnaby, whirling on a gesture as she described the killing of the horse, beheld me there, broke the narrative off short, and turned her guns from the stage company to me.

"Well, who asked you to sit down?" she asked.

"I—I wanted board," I replied, feeling somehow *de trop*.

Mrs. Barnaby regarded me with small, brown, deep-set eyes, and her expression seemed to brand my simple business proposal as an insult.

"Regular, or transient?" she inquired.

"Regular," I faltered. Mrs. Barnaby was looking at me so sharply that I wondered uncomfortably if she had guessed why I chose her establishment.

"Got a job?"

"Oh, yes!"

"At what?"

"Reporter on the *Courier*."

"Editor, huh? Well, I know editors. You pay in advance!" said Mrs. Barnaby.

"How much?"

"Ten a week—for you!"

Meekly, I reached into my pocket, humbly I produced a gold eagle, apologetically I gave it to Mrs. Barnaby. She rang it on the pine table before she lifted her skirt to an indiscreet height for those days, revealing a pair of men's cow-hide top-boots. Into the leg of the nearest, she dropped my coin.

"And you'll get no ham with your eggs, neither," said Mrs. Barnaby, flouncing into the kitchen. "Last to be had in camp was eat by those hogs."

Whereupon the nearest of the three miners turned upon the others and dropped a solemn wink. And I began to perceive that Mrs. Barnaby's bark was worse than her bite.

In fact, when she returned with my smoking hot eggs and my

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steaming coffee, she seemed to have accepted me as a regular boarder. Her manner became almost confidential. She spoke of the difficulty in getting decent provisions—"The last bar'l of flour I bought was great stuff for hanging paper, and that's the best you can say of it"—and the rivalry of Jim Huffaker—"that thievin' squatter!" She touched on the prospects of the camp. This was the only subject upon which Mrs. Barnaby ever, then or thereafter, showed in my presence the lightest sparkle of optimism. Spilling a series of terms which were still Greek to me, she proved to her own satisfaction that it was the greatest discovery ever made in the West. She herself had a grub-stake. And thereupon Mrs. Barnaby dove again to the leg of her boot, produced a specimen.

"What would you say to that?" she asked.

"Looks rich," I commented politely, hypocritically.

"You bet she's rich!" replied Mrs. Barnaby. "When she pans out, no more bakin' hot cakes for you pigs! No more livin' in a tent with every wind puffin' up the carpet. And I'll have a regular door. What this camp needs is doors."

"Where's your tent?" I inquired.

"Out back," replied Mrs. Barnaby. Then she saved me the embarrassment of asking further questions by adding: "I live there with another lady—the one that was with me when they got us robbed."

"Mrs. Deane?" I asked, my eagerness betraying me into a bold question.

"How'd you know her name?" responded Mrs. Barnaby sharply, and then: "Oh, yes, you was gallivantin' round with her by the dead horse. Everybody gallivants with her, or tries to."

"And Mr. Deane?"

"Ain't no Mr. Deane, 's far as is visible to the eye," replied Mrs. Barnaby. Then she seemed to pull back, as though already she had gone too far. She gathered up a pile of soiled dishes and sped back to the kitchen. When she returned, it was only to slam down another plate of hot cakes, remarking that if those didn't fill me up, I wasn't going to

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get filled. She did not reappear, even though I dawdled over my eating. Nor did any other feminine figure part the flap of the front door. Evidently Mrs. Deane breakfasted early.

So at last I finished, wiped my fingers on my handkerchief, and strolled out of doors. The rain had stopped; a brilliant sunlight had turned the wet earth into fields of diamonds. It was even warm for May. Automatically, as though no longer governed by my conscious mind, I turned not toward camp but up the hill. Behind the walled tent of the boarding-house stood a smaller tent, its door-flaps hooked back to take advantage of the sun. And in the entrance sat Mrs. Deane. Her eyes were searching the far distances. Her hands lay in her lap. They held a newspaper.

The same automatic impulse which had turned me in the direction of the cabin carried my feet toward her. In the mood which held her eyes so level and calm I must have appeared to her at first simply as a vague object moving in a hazy landscape. Her eyes fixed themselves absently on me for a moment before she gave a little start, leaned back in her chair. My sharpened intuitions told me that she had suddenly drawn some imperceptible curtain of feminine reserve. Then she smiled; a slow smile which began with her deep-blue eyes and seemed to run, like the morning sunlight down a peak, until it warmed her firm, shapely mouth.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Gilson," she said, conventionally but cordially.

I approached, stood at her side. I was six feet one in those days. I must have towered above her; and for an instant I read in her eyes something akin to panic. Did she tremble? It was no more than a flutter, but it suggested fear. Then she rose suddenly and—

"Let me get you a chair!" she said. She had dropped the newspaper. As I picked it up and restored it to her, I saw that it was this morning's *Cottonwood Courier*. My eye, following her swift, easy movement into the cabin, caught dimly a background of feminine neatness and decorative instinct—

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a pine bunk covered with a clean sheet in lieu of a spread, a worn but well-swept strip of ingrain carpet, a mirror in a plush frame, a picture superfluously decorated at the corner of its frame with bows of blue ribbon. And there floated out to me a subtle suggestion of perfume, which went to my head like wine. She returned with a rough pine chair, set it beside her own. She wore the dress in which I saw her last; plain, thick brown wool, its sole ornament a ruching at the throat and wrists and those billows over the incipient bustle with which women decked or disfigured themselves in that period. For jewellery, there were only a topaz brooch, two little topaz ear-rings which matched the golden glints of her wavy brown hair, and—that wedding-ring.

"I'm a fellow-boarder of yours," I said as we seated ourselves. "I've just given my digestion into the care of Mrs. Barnaby."

"It's safe, I think," commented Mrs. Deane. "She's an inspired cook—though she has little enough to work with here."

"With the disposition which they say accompanies genius," I remarked; and I told her about my passage-at-arms when I applied for board. Mrs. Deane gave her rippling laugh, then said with her air of sweet seriousness and her slight hesitation between words:

"You must remember that she's had a hard life. Her trouble is that she's too generous. She has to be a little gruff to guard herself against herself."

"I can readily understand that," I replied. Then Mrs. Deane looked up—very serious now—and, catching at a past phrase in my narrative, asked:

"Did you say—that you were an editor?"

It had been long since I had opportunity to confide in a woman; and I fairly revelled in the luxury, telling the story of my struggles with mining, my lucky call on Marcus Handy, and my first night on a newspaper. She seemed amused at first; then a shade crossed her expression and—

"You didn't come to interview me?" she asked suddenly and rather breathlessly. This question chilled like a dash of

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cold water my glowing mood. But I hastened to clear myself.

"No—why should I? We haven't a society column as yet," I added with an awkward attempt at subtle gallantry. "Besides, Sunday is my day off. There's no paper on Monday morning."

She did not answer this. A moment of silence followed until she turned the subject with:

"This must be wonderful—for a man—this life up here!"

"It is," said I. "And why not for a woman?"

"Is anything so wonderful for a woman as for a man, I wonder?" she asked. "You must remember, too, that we can't go to the Black Jack and the Comstock Lode." She smiled at that mid-Victorian conceit; and I smiled back. To Mrs. Deane's generation and mine, the picture of a lady in any establishment where hard liquor was sold publicly, seemed so impossible as to be humorous, grotesque.

"Then you don't really like our camp?" said I, almost resentfully. My one night on the *Cottonwood Courier* had begun to develop my spirit of local pride.

"In flashes, I do," she replied. "'Sort of,' as the native Yankee says. But I'm afraid I'm too much a woman to like it wholly. It's terribly brutal in places. Just when you're getting amused by it, thrilled by it, even—you come up against a piece of cruelty. It's like these mountains. They're gay and beautiful now. But I've seen aspects of them which only frighten me—when they're ogres——" She caught her breath; stopped.

"Then what do you really like?" I asked.

The sombre mood seemed suddenly to pass from Mrs. Deane. She smiled again; and again I felt that expression danced from her eyes to her mouth as the morning sunlight dances down the peaks.

"If you were really a stalwart, diamond-in-the-rough Westerner, I shouldn't dare tell you," she said. "But you aren't, yet! Don't they still call you a tenderfoot?"

"Your intuition has perceived my shame. They do."

"Well, I'm afraid I'm still a good deal of a woman. I like

jewels and gewgaws, of course. I can't as yet take all this talk about gold with the proper seriousness. When they talk to me about 'clean-ups'—isn't that the word?—my mind only pictures the stupendous quantity of chased bracelets and earrings and settings for brooches that it will make! I like to sing at the piano and to embroider little designs and to paint little water-colour landscapes, and to go to the theatre—Booth in 'Hamlet,' for example—and pretend that my little soul is really stirred, and to go to church and pretend that I'm really sorry for my little sins, and to make little calls, and to gossip discreetly as a lady should about why John broke his engagement to Mary. I love gossip. That on the surface. And deeper down—security!" She had preceded that word "security" by one of her delicious little rests in the rhythm of her speech; and when she came out with it, her voice seemed to have fallen a whole octave.

"Yes," she continued, beginning almost under her breath, "I love security! I didn't once. I wonder if I haven't a little piece of man in me. But I've learned better. A woman has to follow her nature. Security now above everything. Something you can count on."

"It's curious," said I, "but I left the East to escape that sense of security."

"That's a man for you!" commented Mrs. Deane. "But I can't criticize you! Well, at any rate, we've both learned our lesson early—that a man is a man and a woman a woman."

Somehow, I had taken it for granted that Mrs. Deane was older than I, having yet to learn that any woman is infinitely older in wisdom of the spirit than any man. I turned and looked at her with new eyes. Not the shadow of the tiniest ridge or wrinkle broke the smooth contour of her skin, now tanned to a delicate golden cream colour. This woman, speaking so sombrely of deep things—she was only a young girl after all . . . as I watched her looking with absent eyes toward the panorama of the peaks, I felt that the air about her quivered with an intangible tension, as though ghostly armies were arrayed for battle. Up from the cluster of tents and cabins rose

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the sound of voices singing to the accompaniment of a melodeon: "Alas and Did My Saviour Bleed?" Services were beginning in the gospel tent. That gloomy hymn with its sombre cadences, crowned my mood; and in order to breathe, I must needs utter a commonplace.

"Sunday morning!" I said. "Mother flaxing round—that's how she expresses it—getting into her black silk with the coral jewellery, and the barouche with the team of matched blacks waiting at the door, and Emily off for Sunday-school——"

"And codfish cakes for breakfast!" put in Mrs. Deane.

"That means you hail from Yankee Land!" said I.

"Yes—Providence!" she replied.

I waited for more; but no more came. The impertinent question, "And Mr. Deane?" trembled on the verge of my lips. I put it back, less for the sake of manners than for fear of offending. She looked back at me; and now it seemed that her reminiscent mood had broken. She changed the subject abruptly to personalities of the camp. None of them did I recognize until she asked:

"Do you know the sheriff or marshal or whatever they call him—the one with the wide hat and the impressive imperial—Mr. McGrath?"

"I've met him, he registered my claim," I replied. "Seems like a good fellow," I added, my sense of justice struggling with a less generous emotion.

"He comes in sometimes for meals," volunteered Mrs. Deane. "Everyone compliments his shooting! It's odd, isn't it, living in a world where skill at killing men is the quality everyone most admires? But I suppose war is that way too. I suppose men are that way when they are left alone. I've heard my father say——" Was she trying to tantalize me, that she drew up always just short of a revelation? For she stopped and, as though to change the subject, glanced down at the *Cottonwood Courier*, lying wind-blown at her feet.

"I see by your paper we had another robbery yesterday," she said.

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"Yes. I wrote the account. I suppose from now on I must be professional and call it a 'story,'" I replied. Then, by way of making conversation, I added: "Mr. Handy says it's all the work of one gang. He thinks they may have accomplices in camp." The moment I came out with this, I wished it unsaid. It seemed like betraying the confidence of my paper. Mrs. Deane responded with a casual, balanced "Indeed?" and somehow her own inscrutability spurred me on to still deeper confidences.

"There was one odd thing about that stage robbery," I said. "You know I saw more of it than I admitted that day. I didn't shoot," I went on, hastily justifying myself for my old failure of courage, "because my partner wouldn't let me. He felt that we'd only endanger the lives of the passengers. But their horses were tethered in the bushes beside the road. My partner and I were hidden on the ridge above. We could see them—you couldn't. There was one peculiar horse—a buckskin with a big white mark on his flank. Like that——" I picked up a twig, sketched the pattern on the ground.

"A buckskin?" inquired Mrs. Deane.

"That's what they call it here—yellow—almost the shade of a light tan kid glove. Another curious thing—probably just my imagination, but it struck me at the time. Once one of the bandits who lay on the rocks covering the passengers rose up and seemed to be signalling—to someone in the stage." I had mentioned this odd circumstance as though I had held it in mind ever since the robbery. In cold fact, it had but that moment flashed back into memory.

"Indeed?" she inquired again; but her tone showed some interest, so that I wished I had had more to confide.

"Well—that's all!" I said. "I've wondered if it might be the express messenger."

"As likely as anyone," replied Mrs. Deane. "How do you know, up here, that anyone is what we'd call good in the East?" But she caught her breath as she said it, and paused a moment before she remarked in her voice that dripped the words like honey:

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"You men must find—what shall I call it?—spiritual release—in all this! An atmosphere where you don't have to behave unless you want to."

"Don't you feel any release yourself?" I asked.

"I think I did at first—in my weak, feminine way," she replied. "It's after all quite glorious to be starting into a new world, your Rubicon crossed. But afterward—" she spread out her hands with a pretty, fluttering gesture—"afterward you realize what you are—a woman after all. I suppose, though, that we'll have the last word! The thing you're making here in Cottonwood Camp is only a set of nests for a set of women." Her eyes brightened to mirth as she played on with her fantasy. "You're now just gathering the sticks and straws—and squabbling over them!"

Mrs. Barnaby was picking her way up the muddy path between her kitchen-tent and the cabin. Mrs. Deane looked up, perceived her.

"Gracious! and I promised Mrs. Barnaby to tidy this place up for Sunday!" said Mrs. Deane. Reading in this my dismissal, I rose. She kept her seat. But as she looked up to my farewell bow, I felt again a curtain drawn between her soul and mine. Only behind the curtain burned the light of some emotion—again, was it fear?

CHAPTER X

MOSTLY CAMP POLITICS

SOMEWHAT in spite of my will, the next fortnight gave me my bearings in Cottonwood Camp. Like any young journalist, I was at first far more interested in what I would have called "life" than in the business of life. My knowledge of camp politics and camp finance I took in unconsciously through my pores, while consciously absorbed in the thrilling details of four or five murders, three suicides, innumerable hold-ups; the miner who had fallen down a prospect hole, the prospector who had fought off a grizzly bear with a crowbar.

There were, too, lighter episodes with which I dealt in a spirit of heavy humour. I saw only last year Volume I of the *Cottonwood Courier*, read over some of these ponderous, adolescent jugglings with the English language, and blushed. Once at twilight, an antlered stag emerged from the head of Main Street, stood staring at the lights, and, as the moth to the flame, flew straight down the street through a gauntlet of hasty pistol-shots. None hit him, but an Irish miner named Sweeney was nicked in the leg. When, after the incident, I interviewed Sweeney in his cabin, he took it all as a joke. Two "scarlet denizens of Pearl Street"—that was the conventional tag for our prostitutes—came to blows and to hair-pulling in the roadway, with the spectators forming a ring and egging them on. A clerk in Cohen's, held up by a footpad, yielded his watch gracefully; then followed up the robber, got the drop in turn, and took back his property. Also, at some time in that first fortnight the adventurers of the rush to Frozen River, by virtue of which Buck and I had been able to ac-

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quire our claim from Bill Talbot, came straggling back disillusioned and sullen. It was only a "scare," worked up by a storekeeper who had been foolish enough to establish himself in an unpromising camp. After he had sold his stock at boom prices and departed, the bubble burst. When I had treated this episode with my academic humour, Marcus Handy, stealing ten minutes from the business of making up, slashed my copy all to pieces in order to insert the moral—that anyone who traded the bright prospects of Cottonwood, Crown Camp of the Rockies, for what he called the "ignis fatuus of a sucker proposition," merely branded himself as a dangerous fool. These major articles I filled in with the legitimate but less spectacular activities of camp life—the churches, the fraternal orders, "society."

Marcus himself attended to mining and political news, gathering his items and writing them—or in an emergency setting them up without the intervention of paper and pencil—during the spare moments when he was not laying out editorial policy, soliciting advertisements, making up forms, collecting from advertisers, or planning what he called his "expansion." For in the period Marcus had laid his hands on Mannie Leaven-tritt, a young and ambitious but impecunious new-comer, had set him to soliciting subscriptions on commission. A week later, Mannie was with us permanently as circulation manager, his staff our two brightest newsboys, transformed to carriers. As we expanded and grew, we added an aged clerk to write business letters and keep books. Then Marcus, as he expressed it himself, "snagged a pressman" one morning from the stage, put him to work on the footpower job-press which had all this time stood idle in a corner of the lean-to. Thereafter Mannie added to his other activities that of soliciting job-printing on commission. We even employed a substitute foreman to set up the job work and to read proof when not otherwise employed. Until that time, the *Courier* had gone to press just as it was set, with its sins of typographical omission and commission still on its head. It all gave us more leisure for our strictly professional duties.

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By now I was lodging with Marcus in his cabin behind Siegel's, sharing an eight-by-ten room, where I slept on a rough wooden cot without sheets, and with a sack of waste paper for a pillow. Whenever the cold west wind blew, the unchinked walls peppered us with jets of shrill air. Marcus boarded, however, not with Mrs. Barnaby but with Jim Huffaker. I was glad of that; I shrank a little from contemplation of the moment when that shrewd intelligence would perceive my reason for boarding with Mrs. Barnaby.

As we plodded wearily home through the dimming lights and muted musics of night in camp, as we dressed and shaved, Marcus used my mind as an anvil to shape the rough iron of his thoughts. Those picturesque crimes and peccadilloes of camp life so intensely interesting to me did not, I found, thrill him at all. These, and the Friday hangings which I still plucked out and refurbished from the Denver and Kansas City newspapers, were merely his concessions to popular taste, like the coloured supplements or comic strips of your modern editor. He talked always of business, especially mining; and of local politics—or rather, their lack and necessity. To all of which I for a long time gave but a perfunctory imitation of interest.

Oddly, yet logically enough to anyone who understands youth's slow unfolding, it was an entire outsider to Cottonwood who wakened my slow imagination. His name, I find from reference to that yellowed file of the *Courier*, was John W. Forrester; he was a university-bred mining engineer. Wherefore Marcus, upon sending me to interview this new arrival, added the warning: "Don't even hint in your copy that he's a mining expert, or you'll have the camp shooting at us. And don't put in anything he says except the boom stuff." Marcus cherished the sound conviction that the future of mining belonged to those same technical experts. But he kept that opinion out of the *Courier*. This was another concession to popular taste.

I remember Forrester as young, hawk-faced, subdued in dress and speech. To him I dared admit my university breeding; which caused him to expand a little, grow confidential.

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But the interesting part of his interview was that which I did not write for the *Courier*.

"It's promising, undoubtedly," he said. "All kinds of promise that even the boomers don't realize yet." Here, Mr. Forrester dissertated technically upon lodes, veins, porphyry dikes and other details which as yet soared above my head. It amounted to a chary admission that whereas we were as yet discovering and mining only gold and one combination of silver, anything, as Jim Huffaker had said, might be found. "But that's a long way from saying that it will be found in paying quantities," added Mr. Forrester. "The trouble with your old-timer is that he picks out a sack of high-grade samples, sends them down to be assayed, and imagines his fortune is made. He doesn't let himself realize that he may not have a ton of that high-grade in his whole vein. He doesn't calculate, either, on his location—how much road-building there must be in order to get his eggs to market, and how much haulage. Those things have to be figured before mines produce. What this district needs just now is less optimism—among other things—and a great deal more production."

"But aren't we producing now?" I asked.

"Only in a manner of speaking. The placer gold goes down to Denver. That's easy, because it's concentrated stuff. But the day of placer is almost over in this camp. You send out a little high-grade gold quartz and galena to the smelters and stamp-mills. But the camp isn't even beginning to pay its way. And won't until one of two things happens. Either you must have a railroad to send the medium-grade ore down to the smelters, or you must bring your reducing-plants up here. That means a railroad, too. At present, I doubt if there are eight steam-boilers working in this whole district. And one of them belongs to the sawmill."

"But where does it come from," I asked, "all the money we're spending?"

"Speculation, mainly," replied Mr. Forrester promptly. "Passing from hand to hand the money you pioneers have brought with you." We were talking in the doorway of the

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Comstock Lode. And at this point he waved his hand toward a row of new pine-board shacks that had but that week replaced tents. "Observe those signs," said Mr. Forrester. I read them over—"Mine Broker"—"Dealer in Mines and Mining Property"—"Mine Broker"—"Real Estate and Mining Properties"—"Mine Broker"—

"That's the second stage," he said. "Your Cottonwood is still trying to live like the two Yankees on the desert island, by swapping jackknives. The third stage will come some day, I suppose—for you really have something here. It will be the era of production. But it won't come until men of your sort want it enough to make this camp safe for capital. That's where your newspaper ought to be helping."

"Isn't it safe?" I asked, resentfully.

"Only comparatively. You must make this a place where a man may invest with some feeling of security. At present"—here Mr. Forrester swept a gesture toward the imposing two-story structure of the Black Jack—"your lords and masters," he commented.

In my brutal frankness of youth, I told all this to Marcus.

"Slandering the camp, huh? Well, write what he says about the future of Cottonwood. Omit the editorial," he grunted. But he took this criticism more seriously and reasonably than I knew at the time. That night as he rolled into his bunk and blew out the candle, he remarked apropos of nothing: "Got to cut my wolf loose pretty soon, I guess."

"On what?" I asked.

"Politics and things," replied Marcus, and said no more.

Indeed, now that I had begun to think on that subject, the law and government of our camp seemed to me at times only a part of its picturesqueness and at others just ridiculous. These young commonwealths of the West, I have since found, varied greatly in the speed and efficiency with which they organized for law. All depended, I suppose, on what element first arrived. With us the gamblers, the saloon-keepers, the purveyors of illicit pleasures, the actual criminals had out-

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numbered at first the forces of sobriety. And by virtue of this majority, we still ordered our society by gun-law.

Not that we lacked a few forms of book-law. Cottonwood was in Holton County, an area of mountain and mountain valley as yet scarcely half explored, and as large as an Eastern State. A day's journey westward across the dominant range stood Grizzly, a camp which not long after the Civil War had found gold and prospered, washed out the sands, and virtually died. This was the county seat. We were governed from Grizzly by a sheriff who never, while I inhabited Cottonwood, showed his face in this most important corner of his bailiwick, a county clerk who registered our mining claims officially after they had been registered unofficially by Town Marshal McGrath, and Judge Cowan. It was understood that before summer was over, the County Tax-Collector would come over and assess us for support of these functionaries. Then we might hope for public schools and a few other frills of government. There would be a county election in November. As Cottonwood had already by far the larger population, it behove these officials of Grizzly to make hay while the sun shone.

Municipal government, really, there was none. When, the year before, placer gold was discovered along the creek, the early arrivals had formed a miner's court which administered its own justice in its own rude way. In the autumn Judge Cowan had arrived to establish formal assizes. Taking account of public opinion, he appointed as his sole executive official Chris McGrath, the outstanding pistol-artist of Cottonwood. Of McGrath's antecedents no one knew anything at all; in that stage of mining-camp society, personal inquiry was a serious breach of etiquette. He had come into camp with a bunch of cowboys from over the Divide, and had immediately won glory and gained admiration by pinking in the centre of the forehead a footpad who actually had the drop on him at the time. His rough personal charm did the rest. The title of Town Marshal went by courtesy only. Legally, he was a deputy sheriff of the county, appointed by that absentee sheriff at Grizzly. Doc Evans, who had arrived early and whom I

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now suspect of having left the East for the East's health, and morality, was deputy county coroner. He served without pay, getting his profit from the practice which his office attracted.

I visited Judge Cowan's court-room during his spring term. A relic of an earlier and even rougher day, he had "read law" in some backwoods Ohio office before he stamped West for gold. Having failed at mining, he picked up a living, during the brief prosperity of Grizzly, by practice of his old profession. Then production departed from Grizzly. But in default of any other settlement large enough to be called a town, it remained the county seat. Lawyer Cowan remained; became, in default of a better, Judge Cowan; still in default of a better, held on when the territory attained statehood. He was a little, fat, puffy, conceited barn-swallow of a man, very untidy except for his grey beard, which he trimmed, Vandyke fashion, to a needle-point. When he took the bench, his conceit swelled to an imitation of dignity. His reading in law appeared to me as slight as his knowledge of grammar. Off the bench, spite of his egotisms, he had a kind of natural good-fellowship; and his penchant for stale, racy anecdote did his popularity no harm with the element which fringed his court-room.

He had a full docket, which he ran with a speed mimicking efficiency. It included six murder cases—all the gun episodes that Chris McGrath and Doc Evans had seen fit to bring to the attention of justice. Arthur Colliver, a swart, lean Kentuckian, already a marked figure in camp for his reckless gambling and his dashing appearance when he drove out with "the fancy," represented five of the defendants. In every case he introduced the same plea—"self-defence." The procedure was monotonously invariable. Chris McGrath presented a panel of jurors. The ignorant and weak-voiced prosecuting attorney who accompanied Judge Cowan from Grizzly seldom interposed a challenge; the process of seating lasted only half an hour. The attorneys raced through the business of taking testimony; the stage was set for the great moment of the summing-up.

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When "Judge" Colliver—we all granted him that title—took the floor, he drew almost as well as the variety shows. A little before this climax, he always went out for another drink. The tradition of Daniel Webster still lay strong upon the West. The oratorical lawyer, most brilliant when half-seas over, held the imagination alike of court-room and of jury. Brushing back his mop of black hair, Colliver would work himself up like a camp-meeting preacher to an oratorical frenzy. His mixed metaphors, his misquoted classical allusions framed in defective English grammar, seemed shallow and ridiculous enough when translated to paper; but when he spoke them, he sent chills down my spine. Always he harped on two points. The victim was armed. Everyone in camp was armed, for that matter. But as Colliver brought out this point, you forgot that. And always some witness for the defence testified to a "quick motion toward the hip." There you were. Self-defence, absolute and proved. Judge Cowan closed the affair with a pompous charge full of bad Latin, wherein mercy stood better vindicated than justice. The jurors scarcely left their seats.

At least one of these shootings had been cold-blooded murder. "Baldy" Weiner, the dealer of a small, fixed faro game, was caught by a miner in the act of cheating; he had fired as his victim reached toward the crooked box. The jury acquitted him in an hour. That night he was dealing as usual. The sixth murder, an affair between two miners, brought a conviction of manslaughter in the first degree. Sentence, five years. Colliver did not defend this case.

The docket cleared of the crimes against life, Judge Cowan proceeded with efficient speed to the offences against property. Though hold-ups occurred so commonly that the *Courier* lumped them off under a single head in one corner of the paper, only one footpad came to Judge Cowan's bar. He had dodged round a corner and run squarely into the arms of two prospectors, who caught his hand before he could shoot. Of all criminals I have ever seen, he most looked the part. He had a straight nose running without a break from the line

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of his forehead as in the Greek face; only the effect in his case was not noble, but only mean. Beside that nose two oblique grey eyes glistened dully, like tarnished steel. And his thin, cruel mouth closed like a trap. In spite of Colliver's defence, he was found guilty. Colliver announced intention to appeal. As the deputies led him away, the convicted felon muttered something about getting even.

The pickpocket whose escape from lynching I had witnessed during my first night in camp, got a quick trial and short shrift. Judge Cowan, with special emphasis on the meanness of his crime, sentenced him to ten years. Of minor cases, such as settled communities usually try in police courts, there were none. Under the tolerant rule of Marshal Chris McGrath, plain drunkenness constituted no offence whatever. If an inhabitant was drunk and disorderly, the Marshal arrested him, put him in the log jail for the night, and released him in the morning.

My prying and searchings about camp led me constantly to that jail. Built with a double log wall, provided with a real door reinforced by sheet iron and with a substantially barred window, it had as yet no separate cells. Murderer and transient drunkard alike slept on straw pallets about the stove of the common room. Four deputies, by turns jailer and policeman, stood double guard with rifle and revolver.

Over these janizaries to Marshal McGrath ruled as chief, as Grand Vizier, one Charlie Meek. He it was who, when the Marshal stopped the lynching at the Black Jack, had snapped the handcuffs on the pickpocket. Long a mere supernumerary in the drama of Cottonwood Camp, he was to step forth for a day a leading actor. Life is always playing that trick. A man's acquaintance resembles a picture of a crowd sketched hastily by a newspaper illustrator. In the foreground stand bold, clearly-drawn figures—his friends, family, rivals, enemies. Back of them are indistinct shapes suggested by a line, a curve, heads without features, torsos without definition—his mere acquaintance. Then one of these accessory figures suddenly takes on form, character, importance in the picture.

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If I noticed Charlie Meek at all, it was to classify him as talkative and a trifle of a nuisance. I never opened a conversation with the Marshal, it seemed to me, but Charlie somehow insinuated himself. There was a touch of servility in his attitude toward "the Chief"; when Chris McGrath gave an order, Charlie Meek bustled ostentatiously in its execution. With rough subtlety, he dragged in oblique compliments to the Marshal's valour. When I saw him alone, he rambled on old, inconsequent adventures of his own, wherein he figured always as the hero. At the passages where he "gave the other fellow what for," "Laid it down to him straight," he fairly rolled the words round his tongue; and his voice took on an over-emphasis which gave an odd effect of insincerity. His greenish-grey eye never seemed to fix upon any one spot. Over a tall and rather graceful figure, he wore his rough clothes with a foppish touch; his waistcoat flaunted the heaviest watch-chain in town, his finger a big diamond smothered in a heavy gold setting.

Jim Huffaker's restaurant had the contract for feeding the prisoners. The waiters, bringing over dinner or supper, removed the soiled dishes of the last meal. Consequently, the continuous game of seven-up on the floor proceeded always amidst a most untidy fringe. The sanitary arrangement I shall not attempt to describe; and the eternal scratchings of the prisoners proved that bunks and clothing alike were hunting-grounds for forms of lower life.

Marshal McGrath had nominally an office—a boarded tent on Main Street where proceeded the important business of registering mining claims. But seldom if ever did I find him in those, his official quarters. His hours of leisure he spent at the jail; of fine afternoons he sat in a rocking-chair by its door, smoking a black cigar and holding forth. Usually he had an audience, squatted about him on its heels. He complimented me subtly by making no reference to my late arrival from the East, accepting me quite as an old settler. Once, on a morning when "The Hold-Up Record," at the bottom of our last column, front page, included eight items,

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I asked him what he was doing about footpads. "Not a thing until they give me a detective or two," he replied. "That's up to Grizzly. I've applied twice."

"Or when we get a municipal government," I put in, repeating parrot-like a political observation of Marcus Handy. Marshal McGrath did not take this simple remark simply. His eyes crinkled up, but not with a smile. The lines of his face went hard, as they did when he stepped upon the table of the Black Jack to stop the lynching.

"Tell your editor to keep off that!" he jerked out. "If you don't like the way the county government's run, there'll be an election in November, won't there?" But as though his case needed apology, he went on: "What do they expect, those reformers? A mining-camp ain't a Sunday-school. We haven't had a lynching yet!" That record, it appeared, was the Marshal's special pride.

Yet for all the gloomy forecast of Mr. Forrester, Cottonwood continued to boom and grow; daily the *Courier* reported strikes or "fine prospects" in the mines already working on Liverpool Hill, where the last inch of ground had long been staked out and developed, and in those gulches and crevasses of the mountains where experienced prospectors were sinking shafts with bucket and winch. The stages arrived brimful; every night the public corral overflowed with the wheeled transport of new arrivals. Under my eyes, this crude settlement was transforming itself into a town, a city. And I realized for the first time the complexity of that living-apparatus demanded by modern life. So many things which I had always taken for granted were lacking when I came to Cottonwood; and so many things advertised the lack by their dramatic first appearance in camp! We had been laying away our rich harvest of dead with a plain express wagon, painted black. Through the full sunshine of one Maytime day a new hearse, somewhat spattered by its trip across the passes but very shiny in spots, drove two cheerful undertakers down Main Street, proceeded to a half-finished pine shack. This, with a day more, became

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Dr. Evans' undertaking and embalming-parlour. Thenceforth, the doctor ceased to practise medicine, which greatly improved the health of the camp.

In a gulch above the river valley, a brick-yard began operations. Its kilns were scarcely formed before it had orders six months ahead. Father Cassidy signed the first order. Already his Ladies' Sodality was advertising in the *Courier* its fair for the building-fund. Mr. Sipple, the Presbyterian, was clearing ground for his new wooden church. The Methodists under the fiery Mr. Orcutt got along with their gospel tent, saved souls mightily, and let the Lord take care of the future. Dr. Howells, Episcopalian, arrived at about that time, found quarters for Sunday services in an assay office beside the Comstock Lode Saloon. Gathering my sheaf of ecclesiastical news for the Sunday morning paper, I found that he had sent an urgent call for funds to his denomination in the East. Pending their response, he made no plans; meantime, the noise of sleepers wakening from the billiard-table, of "all-night drunks" making an early start, floated through the cracks in the walls to disturb his lessons, litanies and creeds. Dr. Howells did us Christian service by spending the last of the funds he had brought up from Denver to lease a log-cabin and start a pay-school. Father Cassidy, fearing the winds of adverse doctrine, immediately added to his building-plans a parochial school. Three Sisters of Charity whom he had brought with him possessed themselves of a large tent and started a hospital for pneumonia cases, gunshot wounds and other really serious disabilities.

A herd of fine horses clumping one morning over the drying mud of Main Street heralded a procession of buckboards, buggies and surries, shiny with fresh varnish. The new log corral and barns at which they brought up became forthwith the Pioneer Livery Stable.

Once every week, cowboys in bearskin chaps, their saddles, their bridles, their hat-bands glittering with heavy silver horse-jewellery, drove down that same common highway the beef-herd. At its passage, prudent spectators wise in the lore of

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the West took to the doorways. For these were Texas steers, the tough, belligerent descendants of fighting bulls—rangy as thoroughbred horses, quick as cats, excitable as dogs. They were making toward the *abattoir* which Piggott the butcher had set up on the edge of the town. Now the Odd Fellows had clubbed together and built a wide, low pine shack, floored for dancing. Within a week after the first timber was laid, they held their grand dedication ball. It paid for itself almost within a month; scarcely a night but the Masons, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the G. A. R., the Confederate Veterans or the Knights of Pythias rented it for lodge-meeting or rout. Our camp was already developing an aristocracy—wives of mining engineers, the richer mine-owners and the more prosperous tradesmen. Odd Fellows' Hall was but a fortnight completed when they held an Assembly.

Carpenters for a time got double wages, so that every miner with the least skill at sawing or driving nails deserted the drifts and sought employment at building. Doors, windows and window-panes were now arriving by the truck-load; the burlap portières began to disappear; the portière of gunny-sacking at the door of the *Courier* passed into memory. The pioneer saw-mill had now a rival; but though the two establishments worked double-shift and transformed half a mountain-side from a dryad grove into a littered ruin, they could not keep pace with the demand. Assay offices, groceries, general stores, a pharmacy, innumerable saloons operated in tents or suspended operations while the owners waited for lumber and skilled men.

However, Jim Huffaker had taken time by the forelock. Before the great demand, before the *Courier* began to print its daily wail for carpenters and lumber, he had laid the foundation of his new hotel, had signed contracts for material, had employed workmen. How he was paying for it did not at first sight appear. Admittedly when Jim arrived in the previous autumn he figured as a simple, humble waiter. But even the eye unskilled to business could see that he was taking enormous profit from his restaurant. Besides, lots in the Addition were

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selling at constantly increasing prices; and in the company which staked out that area as a placer claim, Jim owned a larger share than anyone but he knew at the time.

As the snows melted and the mud dried out on the passes, transportation became easier and prices of all commodities fell; but not the cost of fare at Huffaker's. It had become the club, the Rialto, the Bourse, where Cottonwood's wealthy and powerful took their meals, exchanged gossip or information, did business. This popularity had nothing to do with external surroundings. Though tin plates and cups had given place to chinaware, candles in bottles to oil lamps, steel knives to plated silver, the guests still sat on benches and ate from bare pine tables. Even while the main structure remained but a frame, Jim had finished the one-story addition which was to hold the hotel café, and had opened it for business. This had a real mahogany bar—bought second-hand in Denver—mirrors, a dazzling display of glasses, the best bartender in camp; but its physical gauds and glories probably served it less than its prestige as an appurtenance to the "leading caravanserai."

Two doors down the street, the frame-building of the Rocky Mountain Hardware Company was, like the hotel, going up with mysterious speed. Hitherto, that supremely important merchandise, mining-hardware, had been ordered by consignment from Denver. But even before the workmen began to roof this structure, its back yard was piled with mine-buckets, winches, coils of rope, drills and sledges. In and out of this orderly confusion wove at times Jim Huffaker, giving directions. When Buck and I met him on the night of our arrival, he was making almost his last appearance in blue shirt and overalls. Now he wore a broadcloth coat, fastened at the chest by one button, the receding lapels revealing a fancy waistcoat; fine linen, diamond shirt-studs, a starched collar. Daily, Steve the barber coaxed his moustache from its old droop, waxed it to needle-points. This tonsorial change revealed a good-humoured but firm mouth, and lent him an air of authority.

And still we grew and grew—amorphically, without organization, by the process of adding cells like a jellyfish. No stage

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or caravan but brought some representative of a new and necessary trade. Plumbers slept out the first night on the floor of the St. Louis Lodging-House beside physicians, barbers beside dentists, plasterers beside assayers, stationary engineers beside mining engineers. But fast as they came, gamblers and prostitutes, bartenders and sure-thing workers came faster. Now a telegraph line was preparing to start from Denver; and the *Courier* was authorized to state, "on the best authority," that a narrow-gauge railroad was coming. How unreliable that best authority was, Marcus and I alone knew. But Marcus would have printed that report if he had been obliged to invent it. For, as he said, we were bound to have a railroad some day, after——

Marcus had a way, now, of stopping short on that word "after." I knew what he meant; my eyes open, I was beginning even to grow interested in what he meant. We should have in Cottonwood Camp none of the sober development which a railroad symbolized until we achieved security for life and investment. Gun-law, supplemented by a withered and weakly corrupt government a day's journey away, was outworn. Already responsible citizens said that; but said it under their breaths.

Yet day followed day, and still Marcus did not, as he threatened, "cut his wolf loose." Less and less, indeed, did he talk to me about the necessity of a municipal government; more and more did he draw into himself. Almost he seemed morose. As often as the job permitted, he absented himself from the office; when he returned, he brought no news. Once, running into our bedroom mid-afternoon on some trivial errand, I opened the door to find him in close conference with three other men. "Excuse me, kid!" he said quickly. I stepped back, closed the door; but not before I had recognized the good-humoured frog-face of Isidore Cohen the jeweller, and the lean Yankee features of Taylor, president of the bank. Once again, plodding up an unfrequented trail to Liverpool Hill, I saw before me the familiar backs of Marcus and Dr. Howells, the Episcopalian clergyman. They were walking

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with their heads down, like men in intimate but perplexing conversation. I turned up a side-trail. Then—it was toward the end of my third week on the *Courier*—the incident arrived which cut the wolf loose.

CHAPTER XI

MARCUS CUTS HIS WOLF LOOSE

RETURNING from supper to write up my sheaf of miscellaneous information gathered during the afternoon, I found Marcus Handy in close conversation with a stranger. I surveyed him casually as I pushed through the door, and set him down in the tenderfoot class. Then he turned, revealing a stark, small-featured American countenance, now veiled in deep gloom. One would have said, indeed, that he had been crying. Marcus looked up.

"Come here, kid; shake hands with Mr. Curtis," he said. "I want you to listen to this!"

With conscientious precision, Mr. Curtis told his story. He had arrived only three days before, bringing ten thousand dollars, receipts from the sale of his grocery business and his house in Cairo, Illinois; this money he deposited in the Bank of Cottonwood while he saw the town and looked for an opening. In the bar of the Black Jack he met a stranger, also from Illinois, who knew some of his people. Precisely at this moment, I anticipated the whole story. The old-fashioned confidence game had already made its appearance in camp; though never before had the sure thing men played for such a stake as this. And the proceeding, as Mr. Curtis told it in his dead, grief-stricken voice, was typical, orthodox. The meeting with two other strangers—the deal in mines by which he invested nothing and could not lose—the necessity, just when the deal stood at completion, for proving that he had funds—the trip to the bank for his ten thousand dollars—the display of the money in the back room of the Black Jack—

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the discovery, when he returned to the bank, that he held only a packet of waste paper. Mr. Curtis offered no excuses for his innocence and gullibility; he was past vanity. Only when he told us that he had left his family in the East and had expected to send for them did his voice choke and break. This was the second lesson to my slow young imagination in the essential, invariable cruelty of crime.

The story varied, grew more interesting—and especially to Marcus—when Mr. Curtis touched on the aftermath. He had thought it over, swallowed his pride, and reported the matter to Chris McGrath. Chris had promised to look into the matter. “Didn’t seem much interested——” added Mr. Curtis. And he did nothing. At this point, Marcus Handy and I exchanged furtive, significant glances. It was part of an unwritten agreement that Chris McGrath should inform me of all crimes. Concerning this, the most sensational confidence operation which had happened as yet in Cottonwood, he had dropped not even a hint.

Mr. Curtis resumed his narrative. Getting no further with the Town Marshal, he had addressed himself next to Si Conway, head-man, presumably chief stockholder, in that syndicate of gamblers which conducted the Black Jack. “He seemed real astonished that such things could happen in his house,” said Mr. Curtis. “But while he was talking—it was in the bar—I saw one of the fellows that robbed me come out of the back room. ‘That’s him!’ says I, and started to grab him. And the bartender started too. But he got stuck in the door in front of me, and before I could shove past him my man was gone. ‘You did that a-purpose!’ says I, and hit him. But they pulled me off him and threw me out. So I come to you. I want to know if there is any justice in this town!” Here Mr. Curtis raised his subdued voice for the first time, struck a clenched fist into the palm of the other hand.

Marcus Handy spoke, his voice unwontedly low.

“Kid,” he said, “you’ve heard this story, haven’t you? I want you to go straight over to Chris McGrath and put this up to him. Put it strong. Ask him why we haven’t heard

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about this little affair, and what he's done. And on your way home, see Si Conway and touch him up similar. Then come back, and tell me what they have to say." He turned to Mr. Curtis.

As I approached Chris McGrath, sitting in his rocking-chair, chewing his black cigar, I felt that I was not going to relish this job. However, the plain recital of Mr. Curtis had warmed my own indignation; I let some of my feelings into my voice, I suppose, when I retold the story. And as I talked, the smile-wrinkles smoothed out from about the Marshal's eyes; they grew hard.

"Came to your paper!" he interrupted. "Who does he think runs this camp—the county government, or your little two-by-four sheet?"

"I suppose he felt he had to come," I said, unwilling to put the already troubled Mr. Curtis into a false position, "because he thought the authorities were doing nothing."

"Nothing!" snorted Chris McGrath. "And how am I going to do anything until I git a detective or two?"

"But Mr. Curtis says he saw one of the men who robbed him to-day," I argued weakly.

"He did, huh?" inquired Marshal McGrath sardonically. "Then why don't he come to me with the news instead of to your paper? It's a triflin' matter to be botherin' me about anyhow."

"It involves ten thousand dollars," said I.

"Do you think," said Marshal McGrath, "that we're supposed to be wet-nurses for every tenderfoot that comes into camp? What was he doin' anyhow? Tryin' to work a swindle according to his own admission—tryin' to cook up a dirty deal. The other fellow gets ahead of him. And he squeals. How do I even know it happened? I've got nobody's word for it but his. No, boy—" and here the tones of the Marshal's voice, usually so pleasant, vibrant and cordial, took on a jarring note of arrogance, "no, boy, a couple of tenderfoots can't come into a camp and tell the old-timers how to run it." He rose abruptly, fished out from his trousers-pocket a huge key, unlocked the

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door, disappeared inside the jail. But he turned at the last moment, and jerked out:

"Tell your editor I know exactly what he's tryin' to do." The door clanged.

I noticed, as I turned away, that Charlie Meek stood in the shadows by the corner of the jail, on guard with his Winchester. Doubtless, I reflected hazily, he must have heard the conversation.

I found Si Conway in the gambling-room of the Black Jack, watching the faro-tables as they warmed up to their night's run of business. Hitherto, I had not spoken with Si Conway; but I knew him as a personage about camp. He was an aloof and rather mysterious figure, this king of the gamblers. Short and portly, he was yet somehow agile; one of those heavy men who move like a dancing-master. Over his jowly cheeks stretched a skin so dark as to hint at some streak of primitive blood; in the creases of his neck the colouring matter seemed to have settled, as the lees settle in red wine. He had large brown eyes, prominent, almost protruding, but inscrutable and dull. Yet those who knew him pronounced him a good fellow; which I readily understood when I drew him to the one unfrequented corner of the Black Jack and, as tactfully as I could, began my inquisition. For he took it all very simply; and his low voice had an agreeable quality; it seemed oiled with affability.

"I'm right sorry," he said, "if my house has been used for a skin game. It's a public place after all, you know, kid. And anybody will tell you that my games are straight." This, if you went by camp report, rang true. The citizenry of Cottonwood was a set of expert gamblers, most acute in detecting brace boxes and fixed roulette wheels; when they pronounced the gambling at the Black Jack honest, they had a right to be heard. However, Marcus Handy, commenting upon this opinion, had once remarked that Si Conway would be a fool to run his house in any other way; for as it stood, he was getting rich from his percentages and his bar.

"But Mr. Curtis says he saw one of the men that robbed

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him here this afternoon——” and again I recited the story of that episode.

“I was here when he came in, makin’ a disturbance,” said Si Conway. “Who do you suppose he saw? Fritz, one of our porters. That’s who he took for his friend the confidence man. As for the bartender getting in his way, that’s his imagination. I was here, I tell you. The trouble with him is he’s a poor loser, and he’s gone a little crazy.”

“But, after all, he was robbed,” I said.

“Was he?” inquired Si Conway pleasantly. “When a man goes into a game like that, what’s he doing? Fixing to rob somebody else, ain’t he? Then one of his partners in crime turns round and robs him. And instead of taking his medicine, he always hollers, like this party Curtis has done.” The same argument; plausible, almost convincing! “But of course I’ll see it don’t happen again in my house—if it did happen.”

I was turning away; for, after all, I had my answer. But Si Conway called me back.

“What’s your editor going to do about this?”

“I don’t know,” said I. “Print the story, of course.”

“Tell him he better not do anything rash or sudden,” said Si Conway. And his voice lost nothing of its affability.

Re-entering the *Courier* office, I found Marcus at his case, setting type. He looked up; I had never seen him so still and grave. Normally, he was a somewhat dramatic person, as all journalists tend to be. Day by day in the past fortnight I had watched him grow more subdued. I reported accurately, sparing him nothing. At my recital of the Marshal’s closing remark, he started slightly. I came to the valedictory of Si Conway. Marcus was at the moment reaching into the “e” box. He froze like a statue—all but his right hand, which fumbled over the types, picking them up and dropping them with nervous fingers. At last he turned on me; and I saw that he had gone pale.

“Kid,” he said, “you’re a good sort. I guess you’ve got sand. I’m crossing the Rubicon. Will you go with me?”

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"Of course!" I said. Nothing draws youth like a challenge to its courage. Nor did I understand, at that moment, all that my decision implied.

"Then sit down and write the story—straight off—just as it happened—no editorial."

I was finishing my task when Marcus laid before me the proof of his leader, remarking with what seemed to me like forced joviality:

"Think this'll make us enough trouble?"

I read; and I realized that Marcus had outdone himself. His literary faults and merits alike were, as a usual thing, those of the old-time mining-camp editor. He overloaded his thought with words and figures of speech; he wrote in stock phrases. But this editorial was simple, explicit, as forceful and as straight to the point as a pistol-shot. It recited, with the Curtis affair as a text, the present state of Cottonwood Camp—hold-ups, robberies, brace faro games and all. "Where are our schools?" it inquired. "Where is our fire protection? Does any sensible man doubt that a single fire in the heart of town would sweep Cottonwood off the map? Where is our provision for public health? The back alley of Main Street smells as loud as our municipal morals. Where, above everything, is our protection against crime? Do the present authorities really want to suppress our epidemic of hold-ups and highway robberies? Have we here the greatest camp in the Rocky Mountains——" The editorial trailed off into the glories and possibilities of Cottonwood, and ended with a demand for a municipal government—"to replace the existing régime of weak, inefficient bluff."

I looked up from my reading, and my eyes must have told Marcus what I thought.

"It's the Rubicon, I guess," said Marcus; "may get me killed in the next twenty-four hours." And here, as though the weight had begun to lift from his spirits, he became his normal, dramatic self.

"Don't give a damn if I do die," he chuckled. "By God, the sooner they kill me, the sooner we'll clean up Cottonwood!"

CHAPTER XII

A WALK UP THE GULCH

YET it seems to me in setting down the humours, the excitements and the dangers of those first three weeks on the *Cottonwood Courier*, I have been merely scratching the surface of my life. While Cottonwood boomed on—digging, trading, shaking dice with fate, accumulating piles of garbage in its back alleys and a fringe of rusty tin cans about its suburbs—the Rockies had floated on warm, white airs into June. The snows had given place to a sparse herbage of brilliant, ethereal green. The first columbines unfolded their virginal blue and white; the lupine ran streaks of royal purple along the hills; the great peak above us dropped the snow-mantle from its black forests; on clear days it seemed so near that you might have taken its hoary head into your arms. Just so my daily work with its rough hold on realities and its stimulating tang of life lay fringed with a fair, high, pure country of the soul.

For I no longer concealed from myself that I loved Constance Deane, loved her with every kind of warm emotion that a man can hold toward a woman, but mostly—so young was I—as a devotee loves his saint. Like one who sinks by imperceptible degrees under a narcotic, I passed gradually into this torturing yet agreeable madness. And, like a bad patient, I fought the ether. According to the ethics upon which I had been reared, to love a married woman was a thing no genteel person so much as contemplated. When it happened—I had heard rumours of cases—one whispered the news to his intimates in the shocked tone with which one mentions hideous vices. For all our repressed exteriors, we were a romantic lot in the circles of my origin, resolutely shutting our minds to such facts of life

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and lessons of experience as did not fit the picture we found in our sugary fiction. Somewhere there waited for you the One Being. Destiny would bring her down a flowery path to you. Of course, she would be unmarried; it was always arranged that way. There were soft passages at which the sickly imagination of youth grew sweetly faint. Then you were married. And afterward—but imagination halted there. Marriage did not come within the scheme of romance.

I first looked at the facts of this sentimental entanglement—shyly, as round the edge of a door—when I had been for less than a week a boarder at Mrs. Barnaby's.

The presence of Mrs. Deane at that board had worked according to the shrewd Jim Huffaker's prophecy. Herself unconscious, she was bait to Mrs. Barnaby's fishing. Within two days after she consented to receive me, Mrs. Barnaby took no more transients. At twelve dollars a week—ruinous rates for those days—she filled her table with permanent guests. Even could she boast that she shared with Jim Huffaker "the best patronage in camp." As Jim drew the kind of man who in settled communities goes in for clubs, so we gathered up those with inhibited desires for the comfort and society of decent women. Hutchins, a dapper clerk at the bank, Michelson, chief owner in one of the most promising galena claims, Selden, the assayer, Barton, the mining broker, old Pop Eldridge, agent for the stage company—these, probably because they gave me most reason for incipient jealousy, remain most vivid in my memory. Mrs. Barnaby, it appeared, sternly erased from her waiting list all other women than Mrs. Deane. Though, indeed, women of the class which any respectable boarding-house would receive applied but rarely.

So all threads of conversation at that table ran together, knotted themselves, in the person of Mrs. Deane. She had the gift of drawing confidences; her very reserve, backed as it was by a sense of vivid sympathy, seemed to spur the confessor on. Avid for news of the camp and its ways, she led each in turn to gossip of his business, of camp personalities, of new arrivals. In the general chaff and persiflage, I cut a poor

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figure. I was youngest of all these men, and embarrassed in face of their rivalry by thought of my youth. Moreover, when I shared with others the presence of Mrs. Deane, she had the effect of striking me numb and dumb. Now and then, bracing myself with a hysterical effort, I spilled my own budget of news. After all, I was reporter for the one newspaper in camp, specialist and purveyor of the latest intelligences. But I spoke with a husky throat and had the feeling, when I finished, that someone else had been talking—and talking badly.

When I think of her as she was in that rosy dawn of a stormy morning, I see her always as she sat at the head of Mrs. Barnaby's table, the lamplight drawing flecks of gold from the curl of golden-brown hair which tumbled across her shoulder, throwing from her brows shadows that could not veil the blue glint of her eyes, blurring to mystery the quick, whimsical expressions of her mouth. I hear her laughter running its gamut like a flute; the delicious pause and drip of her voice when she hesitated between syllables. And then over that vision rises always the vulgar, invidious glitter of Sam Barton.

My dawning jealousy could find in the conduct of the rest no flaw to criticize. Never had queen more respect, never saint more reverence, than she from this tiny court of hers—all except Barton. He glistened, did Sam Barton—his diamond studs and rings, his heavy watch-charm, even his too-perfect teeth. Most of his profession and kind took meals at Jim Huffaker's, where passed all the gossip of the camp. In his presence at Mrs. Barnaby's I read a sinister meaning. He came to meals a little irregularly, and always at the next meal after an absence flashed as excuse some engagement with this or that magnate of the camp. When he looked at Mrs. Deane, his expression, as I defined it to myself, became sinister, oily, insinuating. Of course, I exaggerated. Still, reviewing Sam Barton after the intervening years, I cannot say that it was all imagination. He alone plied Mrs. Deane with open compliment; he alone sometimes introduced ideas considered in that

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time wholly inappropriate to the hearing of a lady. Which always caused a moment of embarrassed chill about Mrs. Barnaby's dinner-table; a silence broken only when Mrs. Deane adroitly turned the subject.

"There's going to be an Assembly Ball," I announced one evening as, having got the floor, I retailed camp news.

"Guess I'll have to put on a clean collar and take Mrs. Deane! There, boys, got my bid in first!" said Pop Eldridge hastily.

"Aw, no fair—if you tried to dance at your age, you'd look plumb unseemly!" put in Selden.

"Guess I *will* need an assistant," said Pop Eldridge, "in case Mrs. Deane gives me the contract. Boys, why don't we all take her?"

The one exclamative "Sure!" exploded like a bunch of fire-crackers round the table.

"It wouldn't be fair in me," interposed Mrs. Deane, "to monopolize all the best men in camp!"

"If you get your rights," said Sam Barton heavily, insinuatingly, "you'd be the only lady there. But anyhow there'll be eight men to one lady. So you won't average high."

"It's selfish of me," said Mrs. Deane, "but you gentlemen have tempted me beyond my strength. I accept; it's understood, though, that Mr. Eldridge is head escort. So I'll go with you all—you, Mr. Michelson, and you, Mr. Selden—and you, Mr. Gilson——" Here she paused.

"I'm afraid I'll have to forgo the pleasure," I said, trying to keep out of my voice the sulkiness I felt. "But I must drop in to report it," I added, exerting my self-control, "and if I may have the pleasure of one dance——"

But on the night of the ball, having seen Mrs. Deane at dinner with her hair newly curled for the event, having lived through a scattering fire of persiflage which turned me sick of soul, I sulked again. I told myself, as I walked furiously back to the *Courier*, that the ball could go hang; all the while knowing perfectly that I was lying to myself. And at about ten o'clock of an especially busy evening, I dropped a murder

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story half written and took the trail to Odd Fellows' Hall.

Couples were waltzing furiously through the mist raised by their feet from a dusty, soft-pine floor. Two reflector lamps illuminated a background of pathetically sparse evergreen decorations tied up with tiny and sleazy American flags; in the corner, an orchestra of guitars and violins twanged dreamily. Out of the crowd emerged Constance Deane, waltzing. She was in blue brocade, a dress simple for those days. The throat opened in a lace-edged square to show a bosom full, yet virginal . . . I caught my breath. Then I was aware that Barton held her in his arms, held her all too close for current ideas on dancing. He was looking down on her with what I described to myself as his vulgar, insinuating smile. A surge of blood struck with the force of a tidal wave the base of my skull. I could have killed Barton. I hated him because—I loved Constance Deane. It was ridiculous, unprecedented, even disgraceful. But I loved Constance Deane. I loved . . .

Mrs. Hamilton Taylor, her plump red face and diamond earrings topping inappropriately the mighty bulk and swaying hoops of a fluffy white dress, was crossing the floor to me. By right of her position as wife of the cashier and manager of the bank, by virtue of her abundant good humour, Mrs. Taylor had become embryo dictator to our budding aristocracy.

"Did the *Courier* get my list of those present?" she asked. "And *why*, Mr. Gilson, didn't you come as a guest?"

Just then the orchestra delivered its final twang and the dancers turned toward the benches. Over Mrs. Taylor's shoulder I saw Constance Deane, her gloved hand on Barton's arm, turn, sweep the hall with her glance. It stopped on me. She hesitated just an instant in her walk. Even at that distance I seemed to read in her eyes the look that seemed like fear and was not fear. I pulled myself together, bowed. Mrs. Taylor's eyes followed the direction of mine.

"Oh—you know Mrs. Deane, do you?" she asked. "Why haven't I known her before? A lovely creature! Who is she?"

"She—she boards where I do," said I; and was delivered

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from further embarrassment by the interruption of a nervous committee-woman with a question about the punch. But I had got my balance now. I could look at it calmly. I loved Constance Deane!

Now half a dozen men arrayed in every description of evening dress, from swallow-tails to blue reefer-jackets, surrounded her. Impulsively, I started toward that group to claim my dance; as impulsively, I turned, left the hall, walked back to the *Courier*. I could not bear in that moment to see anyone else so much as rest a hand upon her arm. I was jealous of Barton, jealous of the whole world, jealous beyond all things of that wedding-ring.

But lying awake that night with the whoops, the rattle, the music of Cottonwood flowing in discordant waves through the chinks of our cabin, I spawned a rosy hope which became, as my stimulated imagination played upon it, a reality. Widows also wore wedding-rings. I had even read in stories of maidens going to far, perilous places, who assumed for protection the title and symbol of marriage. That was it; that must be it; I could float away now on the enchanted river of my dreams.

It did not seem so plausible when I woke early—for me—next morning, with the brilliant mountain light streaming through my window. I must know. An hour ahead of the dinner-time which was my breakfast, I went over to Mrs. Barnaby's and to that tent where Mrs. Deane lodged.

She came at my call through the flap, faced me with no halt or embarrassment of manner, not even the touch of an emotion like fear. And I realized it was not going to be so easy.

"I saw you at the ball last night," she began. "It was most interesting! Though I must admit I'm tired this morning. You wild Westerners are energetic dancers, Mr. Gilson!" Her head went engagingly to one side as she made this sally. "Why didn't you claim your dance?"

I forced a laugh.

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"I noticed you dancing with Barton. You seemed to be enjoying yourself," I said; and my ill-natured mood must have shown through these simple words. For Mrs. Deane's head came up straight, and her eyes became for a moment serious. Then they twinkled.

"Barton at least has enterprise!" she said.

"You mean—if I'd had the enterprise—" I began. But her laugh cut me off.

"You are to be punished by not understanding what I mean!" she said. "I think if I gave you the chance, you'd be very naughty!"

The charm of her was creeping over me again like a spell. The warm enchantment of that mood relaxed all the fibres of my soul. There was in me no energy for quarrelling or demanding, even had I possessed the right to quarrel and demand. I found myself, indeed, entreating.

"It's an hour yet before my breakfast and your dinner," I said. "Will you suspend sentence long enough to go with me for a walk? That is—if you have nothing better to do."

Mrs. Deane hesitated just a moment. "I never have anything really urgent to do just now," she replied. "Wait until I get into my things, won't you?" There were suggestive feminine rustlings within the tent before she emerged, a little bonnet crowning with blue flowers the glory of her hair, her fingers fluttering like a flock of love-birds over the business of putting on her gloves.

Up from the hill where Cottonwood was building its residence district ran a shallow gulch wherein no miner had as yet found sign of ore, no lumberman a tree large enough to be worth cutting. Even the little brook which had gouged it out from the hills ran unpolluted, heavenly-clean, over entanglements of fern and watercress. Young pines and firs, looking with their tiny perfection of shape like a grove of Christmas-trees, clothed its slopes. Underfoot, the dwarf sage spread its grey-blue mantle of early summer, and all the crevasses were gay with mountain asters. The pines had followed the trail of summer, passed from bloom to fruition; but

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the aromatic scent of their buds, which a month before had sent waves of perfume to mitigate the less agreeable smells of our back alleys, lingered still in the deeper shades. Toward this, as by common impulse of youth and holiday, we turned. She was walking at my right hand; the single great, coiled curl in which her hair was dressed that morning fell over her left shoulder. It gave out a faint perfume, which sent my blood beating; so that I could not trust my voice. A little shelf of rock guarded the approaches to the trail up the gulch. As I helped her across it, I felt that my own hand, at the warmth radiating through her glove, at the soft, yet firm grasp of her fingers, was trembling. She too must have perceived that; for suddenly she withdrew her hand and slipped lightly down into the trail. The very embarrassment of this pulled me together. I controlled my voice and clutched at the first commonplace which popped into my mind.

"Mrs. Taylor was asking about you last night. She was very enthusiastic—called you a radiant creature or something like that."

"Very kind of her," said Mrs. Deane. "Who is Mrs. Taylor?"

"The Mrs. Vanderbilt of the camp—social dictator just now. My mother," I added, letting her imply the compliment, "has always told me to distrust any woman whom other women don't like. And vice versa."

"I like the compliment," replied Mrs. Deane frankly. "For at the risk of seeming conceited, I declare to you that I believe as your mother does. And I like women, too. On the whole, it's my favourite sex!"

"You'll not want long for feminine society, then," I said. "I think Mrs. Taylor is preparing to call. You'll become at once a member of the élite, associating with the wives of the mining engineers."

"A dazzling prospect, certainly!" exclaimed Mrs. Deane. Then suddenly the laughter died from her eyes. "Did Mrs. Taylor tell you she was going to call?" she asked, her voice a trifle muffled.

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"Oh, no! That was merely my inference. Only I can see that you're elected. Mrs. Taylor is the outward and visible sign—like an accolade or a royal proclamation."

"If she says anything about that to you, discourage it." Mrs. Deane had slackened her pace. "I'm not sure I wish to belong to the camp aristocracy—there are so many other interesting things here, after all—and I may not stay long enough to make it worth while."

"Then you're going soon!" I exclaimed; and my voice, in spite of my will, was sharp.

"That depends on many things. Oh, I must have some of those daisies!" replied Mrs. Deane. I knew perfectly that she was changing the subject deliberately, and that I was rebuked. She had dropped on one knee at a bed where mountain asters, pink and blue, fringed the stream. I knelt beside her; we picked two double handfuls, fringed them with fern from the stream-bed, tied their stems—tight, bunchy bouquets being then the fashion in flowers—with withes of dandelion-stalk. And as we plucked, Mrs. Deane chattered of pinks and bachelor-buttons and phlox and damask roses and all the familiar New England flowers. I mentioned our garden at Cohasset, and launched on a description of Mother—her beauties, her amusing conservatisms and her humours—hoping that confidence would beget confidence. But Mrs. Deane responded with appreciative generalities. No word of hers so much as hinted that she ever had a mother!

When our bouquet was done, she asked for the time, found that it lacked but ten minutes of the dinner-hour at Mrs. Barnaby's. We stood by the flap-door of her tent now, and the question I had come to ask had been parried. I could not face the next twenty-four hours without some satisfaction of my inflamed curiosity.

"Did you say you might be going away soon?" I asked.

"Perhaps."

Then I blundered boldly toward the heart of the subject.

"When Mr. Deane comes for you?"

She was laying her hand on the tent-flap. It stopped,

frozen, and she shot out one quick glance before she answered:

"Call it that if you wish."

Already convicted in her eyes of impertinence and curiosity, I might as well be hanged for an old sheep as a lamb. So I pursued the subject.

"There is a Mr. Deane, then—a living Mr. Deane?"

"Yes. Do I seem like a widow?" she asked rather sharply, and was gone inside the tent.

Yet when ten minutes later she entered the dining-room and took her accustomed seat, her manner toward me had neither warmed nor chilled. It was a crumb of comfort to perceive that if she had changed toward anyone, it was Barton. Somehow, she broke down that day his monopoly of conversation; the more readily as Barton showed less than his usual disposition to converse. He boarded out his week with Mrs. Barnaby, and was seen among us no more. I suspected then what a dramatic revelation afterward confirmed—that he had taken too much for granted the night before. So exit Barton from the board; only a pawn in the game Fate was playing with me, but a pawn whose single move had served—and was to serve again.

She was married. Constance Deane was married. I tried, as I walked downtown, to resolve that I would move from Mrs. Barnaby's and never see her again, and, even while making this resolution, knew that I was deceiving myself.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAIL TO FORTY-ROD

I LOOKED up through the hazy but brilliant light thrown by the edge of the mountain-shadow—for it was late afternoon and already sunset in that gulch. The trail, as it wound its sinuous course upward toward Forty-Rod, curved round a castle-like shoulder of striated rock and crossed a hill-side. A moment visible as a black patch against the electric-blue sky, in a moment hidden by a little hogback of intervening rock, appeared a horse at a slow walk. He bore a side-saddle; the rider was a woman. Just as she disappeared, she leaned forward, laid her hand on the horse's neck as though steadying herself for the descent or arranging something at the pommel. In a world of women, I could never mistake that motion. It was Mrs. Deane. She was coming down the trail; I should encounter her, ride with her! The mere fire story which was taking me to Forty-Rod might go hang. I kept my own horse at a walk, prolonging the delicious anticipation.

A sense of a triumph almost malicious slashed the glory of this mood. On the day when we walked up the gulch, I had learned that Mrs. Deane kept a horse at the Pioneer Livery Stable, went riding sometimes of afternoons. Since then, a week had passed; and the affair had moved a little. My morning call had become a matter of routine. On rising, I fortified myself with a cup of coffee at the Golden Eagle Restaurant, killed time until the decent hour of eleven, and took my way to the tent behind Mrs. Barnaby's.

For an hour, thereafter, we had talked. I burrowed through her shell of reserve to her thoughts and feelings about

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books, music, the little world of Cottonwood, the big world which we two had left behind. But I came no nearer the heart of the mystery about Mrs. Deane herself. For the time being, I contented myself with that. I was drifting; where, I scarcely wanted to know, because that would involve looking out toward the future, discerning the end of the course. I had tried to carry our intimacy further by first hinting and then openly suggesting excursions into the social activities of Cottonwood. She parried the hints, rejected the suggestions. I asked her boldly if I might go with her on one of her afternoon rides. She refused without even the concession of tact; but by implication let me guess that she feared camp gossip.

Now, purely by accident, I was going to ride with her nevertheless . . . her horse's head emerged about the grey barrier of rock. She had dropped the reins on his neck; as he walked, he was cropping at the bushes by the roadside. She still leaned forward, her hands resting on the pommel. Resting—nay, clutching. We were so near now that my horse stopped because hers was blocking the trail. And looking straight at me, through me, was the face of a Constance Deane which I had never seen before. Those blue eyes were set and hard, yet absent. It was as though she were sleep-walking toward some challenging, repulsive vision. The lines of her face were all fallen, the corners of her expressive mouth drawn downward. Misery or hate or anger—whatever this emotion was—it held her with devastating, overpowering force. All this I saw in a wink of an eye before my rather independent little roan plunged forward and nipped at the intruder in his path. At that awakening motion, she gave a hysterical start, so violent that she bent backward over the cantle of her saddle; she stared at me with round, terrified eyes and mouth. Then, before I could utter a word of reassurance, she dismounted in one swift motion, stood in the roadway gripping a horn of her side-saddle with both hands. And the terror was still upon her face.

I dismounted in turn; stood facing her there in the road.

"What is the matter—are you ill?" I asked.

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Something of the normal Constance Deane began to come back into her face. It lightened now; but yet I felt that her smile was forced.

"No—you frightened me coming upon me so suddenly," she said. Then the smile went, driven away by a tense expression. She stared at me a moment before she asked with a catch in her voice:

"Why did you—are you—following me?"

"Why should I follow you? You said I might not ride with you," I replied, for a moment piqued; yet taking at once the defensive, as a man always will with the woman he loves.

"Yes," breathed Constance Deane. And what she meant by that simple monosyllable I could not tell, except that it expressed pain. She straightened up, took hold of the saddle as though to mount. Instinctively, I stepped forward to help her. She turned, laid her hand on my outstretched arm, trying weakly, it seemed, to fend me away. And it was as though that light touch pulled a trigger which had been restraining an explosion of passion. I did the thing which, one minute before, I would have thought impossible.

"Constance!" I said. "Constance!" I had never called her by that name before. And I took her into my arms. She did not struggle against me. She lay for a moment inert in my embrace. Then her hands dropped from the saddle, went round my shoulders. And I kissed her—long, long, in ecstasy.

But as the hammering of blood against my brain died out, as the red mist cleared from my eyes, I realized that Constance had not returned my kiss, that her arms clung to me not in an embrace but as though she had grasped at me for support, for safety. Then her hands fell from my neck, began gently to push me away. We stood facing each other. Again that black mood lay on her face. She swayed, grasped at her saddle-horn. I stepped forward—this time in fear she might fall, she was trembling so—but one hand lifted itself for an instant and warned me back. Now her trembling increased to a quaking which shook her whole body, broke her speech into queer fragments as she said:

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"Robert—why did you—why did we—do this?"

"You know why," I said. "Because I love you!"

"Yes!" said Constance, and repeated it as though the words were a poem. "You love me!"

"And you too!" I said. "You too!"

She started to answer; and with another rush of blood against the base of my brain, I anticipated her word. But she did not speak. And suddenly her trembling stopped.

"If I did," she said, "what good would it do? What could come of it?"

I saw what she meant; and the obstacle between us, which only just now had appeared so feathery-light, became a stone wall.

"I shouldn't have done this!" she went on, every moment becoming more the mistress of herself. "Shouldn't have let you do it."

"You couldn't have stopped me!" I replied. "I couldn't stop myself."

"Such things are always in the woman's hands." Almost was she again the Constance I knew. I had rent for an instant the veil over her soul; now I could feel its edges drawing together again. She turned to where the two horses, unperceiving witnesses of this crisis in human affairs, were grazing through their bits on the edge of the stream. "Hadn't you better hitch them?" she said. "Then come back here and talk—if you wish to talk this over any further."

The simple act of catching the horses, tossing the bridles over their heads, steadied me also. I turned back. She had seated herself on a broken pillar of the castle rock, and her eyes regarded me steadily as I advanced.

"Robert," she began, "don't you think you had better go away?"

"From camp?" I asked.

"From me. See me no more. You will be safest so."

"Safest from what?"

"From yourself—and me!"

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"What is the danger in you?"

"Robert, a man is always in danger when he loves a married woman!—unless—" here her voice grew sharp for an instant, "unless this is only a flirtation with you. Unless you are that kind of man."

"I couldn't tell you," I said, "how much this isn't a flirtation. Don't you think I've fought it? Don't you know that I did what I did just now because my guard was down, and you touched me and I was carried beyond myself?"

"I know all that," she said. "I'm trying to be very honest now. And it isn't honest in me, Robert, to say I doubt your honour. I'm certain of that. You're not like—well, our friend Barton, for example."

"He was—familiar?" I asked, my hands clenching.

"Oh, somewhat. But don't let that trouble you. With you, it's different. Don't you think you'd better leave me—for your own good?"

"Constance, is it absolutely hopeless?"

"Absolutely," she said finally, firmly.

"But you're in trouble. I want to help." I was pleading now like a starving man for crumbs.

She searched my face with a quick glance.

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you looked—before you saw me—to-day."

"But you can't help," she said decidedly.

"If there's one chance in a hundred million to help you, I want that more than anything else that I can have in life," I said.

She rested her elbow on her knee, dropped her chin into her palm, and gazed at the stream.

"Robert," she said finally, "if I let you—stay in my life—do you think you can go on as before—just coming to talk to me now and then until—until perhaps I go away?"

"If that is all you will give me—I have no choice!"

"I can give no more. Even then, I warn you that you are likely to be burned."

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"But will you be burned? That is a thing which matters."

"No, it doesn't matter. I am already burned—scorched—withered."

"Constance, won't you tell me about yourself?"

"That isn't living up to the conditions," she replied. "No!" Suddenly, with one of her light movements, she slipped to the ground. "I'm going now. Would you mind fixing the reins for me?" As I turned to throw the bridle over her horse's head, I saw that she had swung unaided from a wayside rock into the side-saddle.

"Where were you going?" she asked, looking not at me but at her hands as they grasped the reins.

"To Forty-Rod. Matter of a little story about a fire," I said. "It isn't really important. If——" But now she looked at me, shook her head.

"No. Go on with it. I want to ride back alone. Try to forget this afternoon. Let us play it hasn't happened." With the touch of an expert horsewoman, she gathered the reins, and her brown nag started up.

She broke him into a trot, into a lope. Once she looked back, saw me staring after her, turned her head quickly to face the road. Then she disappeared round the hill.

CHAPTER XIV

HAYDEN HILL

THE aftermath of Marcus Handy's editorial on the political incompetence of Cottonwood was blurred and obscured for both the camp and me by another event, which seemed temporarily much more important in the scheme of fate.

I was wakened next morning by prolonged knocking at my door, and by the protesting grunts of Marcus Handy. As I struggled out of sleep, I saw Marcus sitting up in bed in his white-and-red night-shirt, holding his 45-calibre side-arm at ready. Then from outside a voice spoke; and Marcus, as he grasped the meaning of the words, laid down his revolver with another grunt, pulled the clothes up over his ears, and fell once more asleep.

"Does Bob Gilson live here? All right. Buck—Buck Hayden—wants to see you out to his claim right away. Says it's important!" came a heavy voice from without.

I hurled myself out of bed, anticipating accident and calamity, dressed, hurried to the livery stable for my horse and through a clear, inspiriting June air rode up the busy creek toward the rocky curve which I seemed to have abandoned such eternities ago. Busy all the way with speculation, as usual in such circumstances I reviewed every possibility except the true solution. The transaction between Buck, Shorty and me had been going irregularly. On the first Saturday night, he had appeared at the office, paid me fifteen dollars on his note. The following Saturday, came Buck with a slightly embarrassed air.

"Kid," he had said, "are you all right for ready cash?"

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"Yes," I replied, "why?"

Buck hesitated, as though picking and choosing his words.

"Because I'd like to have you go light on Shorty for a couple of weeks," he said finally. "Sort of forgit he's owin' you money."

I considered. In reality, I had almost forgotten this debt in my absorption with the new job. But a man, I reflected, must guard his own interests. Therefore I replied:

"If he intends to pay in the end."

"I'm guaranteein' that payment," said Buck. "Is that enough for you, or do you want my John Hancock on it?"

"Of course I'll take your word for anything, Buck!" I said, my real feelings breaking through my artificial caution.

"Thought you'd look at it that way," said Buck. "Thanks." Into that last simple word he put a world of gratitude, understanding, even affection. He turned away; but at the door he stopped. "I'd tell you all about it if it was just my lone hand," he said. "But Shorty kind of objects," and he was gone.

Was trouble breaking between Buck and Shorty? I wondered, as I rode toward the claim. Even had there been a tragedy? And, whatever happened, I must get through this thing quickly. For I did not want to miss a single one of those noon breakfasts at Mrs. Barnaby's, which were midday dinner for the rest but noon breakfast for me, and where daily I met—Constance Deane.

This was the claim, at the curve of the creek; but what had happened to the cabin? Its thatched and sodded roof lay on the bank, braced up six feet high on posts; from beneath it protruded various familiar objects of human use, such as our Dutch oven, my old set of red blankets. Where the cabin itself had stood were only chips, piles of sawdust, strips of bark, a trampled floor.

I was hailed from the hill-side across the creek. I looked up, and was aware of a new object in the landscape. A timbered hole gaped at me, black and brutal-mouthed; beside it

lay a fresh new dump, so small that even my inexperienced eye could see how shallow as yet was the tunnel which fed it. From that orifice Buck had emerged, taking off his hat to extinguish a miner's lamp, was walking toward me not with his customary even stride, but rapidly, jerkily. I dismounted, started toward him; he waved me back. As he approached, I saw that his eye glittered with some unnatural excitement.

"Got to see you alone, kid—all alone!" he shot out. He looked round; his eye rested on that ridiculous shack of thatching and poles. Into this he drew me. He squatted on his heels, scrutinized all approaches before he burst out:

"Kid, don't it beat the Dutch?—I've struck it—struck it rich!"

"You have?" I asked inconsequently.

"I sure have—Shorty and me have—as rich as——" Buck paused, as though to find a simile wild enough to express the situation. "Rich as hell!" he concluded.

From my whirl of thoughts and emotions, not all generous, I brought out another triviality.

"Gold quartz?" I asked.

"Gold quartz your grandma!" ejaculated Buck. "Gold's a sucker proposition. No! What I've got is the only poor man's ore. Silver carbonates!"

He might have been talking Arabic for all I grasped the dramatic meaning in that technical term. But Buck was running on:

"You can scoop her out with a spoon—assays three hundred to the ton—she widens as she goes in—that stuff we hated so like pizen——"

"That sand?"

"You've called it. Shorty seen it!" Buck stopped here, fumbled through the pockets of his overalls, produced a creased paper. "Here's where you come in," he said. It was a mining claim, filled out in my name and as yet, I saw, unregistered. "Ain't our claim!" Buck hastened to explain. "It's the ground next. And"—he waved an excited hand toward the hill-side—"she's crammed with it, jammed with it! You can't

lose! Your play is to git this registered quick, before the rush starts. Ride, boy!"

Yet I lingered to extract the details. Two years before, Shorty, as Buck expressed it, had been "shoved out of Mexico." With a "college-bred mining expert"—Buck's phrase again—he had been looking for gold. And down in Chihuahua they had found the natives washing not gold but a brittle sand. It was lead carbonates bearing silver, the expert informed Shorty. Further, they had tunnelled into the adjoining hill, had found the parent body. Some of this ore assayed better than three hundred dollars a ton. So much they extracted from the *cholo* workmen. Then the "Mex boss" came back. He looked at things differently. That night he tried to murder the two Americans and, failing, raised the *rurales* against them. They barely got out to El Paso with their lives.

And Shorty had not worked a day on our claim before he recognized that brittle sand, which had so hampered our gold-washing, as the same ore. Being a man of experience, Shorty did not trust the assay to the discretion of Cottonwood. He rode by night to Forty-Rod, where a single assayer still lived on the surviving hopes of that exploded camp, gave an impersonation of a prospector from across the Pyrite Range, deposited his sample, rode again to get the report. It was lead carbonates; and the sample assayed three hundred dollars a ton in silver alone. How Shorty overcame the innate conservatism of Buck did not at this moment come out. I imagine that when Buck raked over those little pellets of pure silver which the blowpipe had magicked from this inert sand, his single-minded belief in gold collapsed. At any rate, he was by now so thoroughly converted as to forget that he ever held any other faith. Of course, the sand in our stream was but a trifling overflow from some main body of ore. Where did it lie? Shorty, working merely on a hazy resemblance between the lay of this land and that in the Mexican diggings, "sort of suspected"—said Buck—the hill-side across the creek. He selected, I know now, the spot which of all locations on that

hill-side would have been the last choice to an expert mining engineer. But there is more luck in silver-mining than any expert will admit; and the kind of man that Shorty was, always played the game of life in the spirit of one who shakes dice for the drinks.

The crafty Shorty, as I half suspected at the time, had not parted with the last of his resources when he produced that hundred-dollar bill from the back of his watch. They bought the necessary tools, explosives and apparatus in Cottonwood, hired for assistant a Swede who not only knew nothing about minerals, but almost nothing about the English language. Mining timbers being expensive and slow of delivery, they had cast their last coin into the pot, and torn down the cabin for the purpose.

Skidding out their débris on a crude sled and a trackway of poles, in a fortnight they had driven their tunnel twenty feet from the prism and had come to a streak of carbonates. It widened to a vein, to a pocket, to Heaven knew what. . . . The assayer at Forty-Rod had by now given up the struggle and departed. It was necessary to take chances with a Cottonwood man. Buck knew what that might mean. Already his conscience and kindness were troubled because I, who shared the discovery of that curious sand, had no longer any stake in the game. And Shorty, as aforesaid, refused to give me a share, maintaining with justice that hundreds of others must have seen that sand and failed to identify it; that if anyone should be favoured in this transaction it was he, Shorty. So yesterday, before they visited Cottonwood to get final results, Buck had staked out for me a claim next to the twin-property of the partnership, had drawn up the necessary papers; and, but for Shorty's insistence on their agreement of secrecy, would have broken the news to me there and then. The samples from the tunnel assayed three hundred dollars a ton and upward; the farther you went, the richer it got. In approaching Major Brown, the Cottonwood assayer, Buck had maintained the fiction that he came from over the range. But in Brown's porter and man of all work—who was not in the

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office when he delivered the samples—Buck recognized an individual that had formerly delivered meat along the creek. This porter hailed him by name. "He's seen this tunnel—the boys on these here placers think I am digging for gold quartz. Only a matter of time till he puts two and two together and she gets out," remarked Buck. He swept his gaze over the hill. "By Gee, she's out now!" he said. "Lookee thar!" Dim on the hillcrest, two men were digging furiously. Buck scrutinized the group for a moment. "Just as I figgered," he said; "Major Brown, the assayer, and his hired man. They put two and two together damn quick! Shorty's sitting on your claim with a shotgun and the Swede," he added. "Already started a shaft so's you can claim development work. But you never can tell. Git this registered and git back—now vamoose!"

My roan, I had discovered, possessed a trick of speed. I let him go his best. I was in a state of mind which I can describe only as triumphant greed. It was as though I had played a dollar on the faro-table and drawn to myself, at the turn of the card, bales of twenty-dollar bills, bushels of gold. Hitherto I had stood apart from Cottonwood, a detached, romantic observer. Now the current universal which inspired all these mighty labours, these flamboyant follies, had drawn me in and swept me away with the rest. I was going to be rich, rich! Rich in my own right, through my own enterprise! I had absorbed, indeed, not only the joyous greed of Cottonwood, but its indomitable optimism. I no more doubted than Buck that the piece of inert earth of which I was so strangely possessed, held fortune. That I was already a pampered child of luxury, needing no wealth beyond that which my father had won for me, never entered my mind. I had made a fortune in my own right. I would tell Constance about it—Constance Deane. She and I—and there the rosy light which illuminated my dream flickered and went out. I could not throw this fortune into the lap of Constance. Encircling Constance Deane, a barrier and a cage, was that mysterious wedding-ring. . . .

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And as I rode furiously down the creek road and into the head of Main Street, another drop of acid worry curdled my triumphant mood. That morning's *Courier* would carry the editorial about the Curtis case, a challenge to Marshal Chris McGrath. And Chris was the official registrar of mining claims. Was he up yet? He usually slept late. If he was already in his office, he might find ways to block my claim. But when I entered, giving an impersonation of leisure, there was within only his blonde, sphinx-like little clerk. He glanced over the form which Buck had filled out for me.

"All right," he said, "come back to-morrow." I had not expected this; and my ingenuity was taxed to invent a lie plausible enough to suit the circumstances. I created it at last—something about having to leave camp that afternoon to be gone a week.

"It'll make a lot of trouble," said the clerk; and his manner was insinuating. By good fortune, I carried most of my money on my person, as was the fashion in Cottonwood. I drew out a gold double-eagle, balanced it carelessly as I said:

"I'd be sorry to trouble you; but I want it done now." The clerk fell immediately to work; in ten minutes, I had the title, all registered and sworn; and he had, besides his fee, my twenty dollars. Another glimpse, I reflected, into the run of affairs at Cottonwood. My little piece of justifiable bribery had occurred to me just in time; for as I mounted and rode away, I passed the Marshal, headed for his office.

Then, as I emerged into the head of Main Street, I saw that I was not riding alone. Down the road, other horsemen, carrying awkwardly across their saddle-horns shovels, picks, mining paraphernalia, were spurring furiously northward. The assayer, it appeared, had, before he rode to stake his claim, imparted the secret to his friends, and they to other friends. Hayden Hill—for so it was henceforth to be known in mining history—had been the one stone that the builders of Cottonwood rejected. Its smooth surface, singularly unbroken by rocks for a hill-side in these mountains, had shown no outcroppings; and none of the ore-bodies sketchily mapped out

by our miners and engineers seemed to dip in that direction. Elsewhere, the hills were pitted with prospect holes; here, Buck and Shorty had been the first to break ground. But then, no one had hitherto suspected the existence, in these formations, of lead carbonates—an ore, indeed, almost unknown to our Western miners of the seventies. I was to learn long afterward how lucky these two adventurers had been. After Hayden Hill was worked out, the mining engineers remarked that among all the kidneys of precious ore which sprinkled its entrails, none other came half so near the surface as that into which Buck and Shorty had thrust their tunnel.

I rode into sight of a transformation. Dotted here and there over Hayden Hill, horses were tethered or roaming at will; groups of men were digging or driving stakes; riders, fording the creek at a furious gait, were spurring on over the crest. Down by the site of our cabin, Buck's last stake in his gamble with fortune, stood a knot of men gesticulating. As I rode toward them, I saw Buck in their centre; and as I dismounted, the air shook with a resounding, unanimous "Aye!" The meeting, whatever it was, stood adjourned. Part of the crowd splashed through the creek and part surrounded Buck, shaking hands, slapping him on the back.

"Hello—there's the kid!" exclaimed Buck as I approached. "Boys, shake hands with Mr. Gilson, the kid—located the next claim after ours——" and I had to take my own pummeling. "And now," concluded Buck, "you boys better hustle back to your locations and git set for the rush!" Obediently, the rest of the crowd scattered; Buck, but yesterday a private in the hosts of ill luck, had become a commanding general in the army of fortune. And already he looked it; his tall, rangy figure had stiffened to a pose of authority. For the first time I realized that Buck, if he should ever clean up, would be a mightily presentable figure of a man.

"Miners' meeting!" he answered my word of inquiry. "If we don't work together, there'll be claim-jumpin' and shootin' all over the hill to-night! Just as soon as the crowd gits thick enough—we'll have all Cottonwood up here by nightfall—I'm

going to hire mine-guards for the whole bunch—you too. And a miner or two to keep your development work goin'. They're locatin' fast. Got any friend you want to let in on this?"

My conscience smote me a resounding thump. I had been less generous than Buck; I had never thought of Marcus Handy, employer and friend. It is odd, as I look back, to remember that Constance Deane did not cross my mind in connexion with this gamble for fortune. But to me Constance dwelt in a world apart from the practical realities of Cottonwood.

Still breakfastless, I mounted and spurred back toward camp. I had not gone two hundred yards before I realized that my generous impulse had come too late. The trickle along the road was now a flood. Horsemen weaved through knots of pedestrians, walking briskly or puffing along at a clumsy run. All Hayden Hill must be staked out by now. Then I saw a way out; and the tangled, excited emotions of that fall morning melted into a rosy, altruistic glow. It would take money to reach my ore-body. I had no money, or but little—unless I drew on my mother. Marcus should put up that money and receive half of my claim.

Main Street was almost deserted as I galloped toward the office. I pulled up my horse to make a sharp turn round a freight-wagon blocking the entrance to our street, and there coming along the pavement toward me was Marshal McGrath. He had seen me first, was stopping. He was reaching toward his hip. His face was a mask—as on that night when he stopped the lynching. My arm tingled with an impulse which a flash of reason, happily for me, put back. Did I but make a motion to draw, this dead shot would kill me in my tracks. Suddenly the Marshal's hand stopped, fell to his side; and he turned away.

"Tenderfoot, better go up and look after your little, black-mailin' friend," he said through clenched teeth.

I galloped on. From the door of the *Courier* burst Johnnie the office boy—mercurial, excitable, Celtic.

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"The boss is hurt—oh, the boss is hurt!" he gasped.

I rushed inside. Marcus sat at the desk, head and back hunched over his arms. There was blood on the scattered papers. And then—he moved—moved, turned round, faced me. His nose was bleeding. So was a cut over his left eye. One side of his mouth was beginning to puff, but the other smiled.

"He beat me up," said Marcus, "that dirty crook McGrath—sneaked on me and got my gun and beat me up. Didn't kill me and didn't give me a chance to kill him—just beat me up. God, I feel relieved!"

CHAPTER XV

MARCUS TETHERS HIS WOLF

HAD Town Marshal McGrath assaulted Marcus Handy on a day when the camp was booming along at its accustomed pace, the politics of Cottonwood might at once have rushed forward to a climax. I speculate yet on this, wondering if it all would have turned out more happily, in that event, for Marcus Handy and me. More and more the "business element" and the better men who lived by industry—which meant of course most of us—were beginning to see level with that errant mining engineer, Forrester, who first opened my own eyes. But also, more and more had the gamblers, the dispensers of vice and the actual criminals grown insolent and overbearing through immunity. To meet this situation head-on would have taken all a man's courage with both property and life. If the citizenry of Cottonwood boasted in common any virtue, it was courage. But things were going very well for most of us; decent public opinion in general, while deploring our civic condition, inclined to let well enough alone. It needed a dramatic incident to crystallize the Western spirit of fair play, to translate sentiment into action. This unfair and brutal assault by a sworn officer of the law might have served that purpose—but for the discovery on Hayden Hill.

The ebullient joy inspired by that event left no room in the public bosom for any other emotion. By afternoon the camp had become a madhouse; by night, a joyous chaos. As the news spread from bar to bar, every citizen who had nothing pressing to occupy his attention rode or tramped up the creek, to surround the mouth of Buck's tunnel, to hurl persiflage or encouragement at the locators, furiously starting their

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development work. After supper, these actual or potential favourites of fortune entered camp like conquering heroes. From saloon to saloon, from dance-hall to dance-hall they strolled, followed everywhere by admiring, laughing, excited, hand-shaking crowds. The comedians at the variety shows introduced Hayden Hill at once into their topical songs. For Hayden Hill it was before night—a tribute to personality, since of the two partners Shorty deserved without question main credit for the discovery. It was settled now, said the public opinion of the bar-rails. Cottonwood was a “permanent camp.” Permanent! She was the greatest camp ever discovered in the Rockies—in the world—in the universe! Owners of mere prospect holes, ready to abandon the struggle and re-locate, took new heart of grace at this promise of a Golconda underlying the whole region; new-comers who had not so much as looked over the ground beheld themselves millionaires.

Even Marcus Handy, nursing his physical and moral injuries, was caught up in the universal wave of optimism and enthusiasm. He had better reason than most of the rest. Before I had finished staunching his wounds, I had broken the news in one confused burst; and hastened to inform him that he was to be my partner. Marcus balked a little at that.

“I’m afraid you’re letting your generosity get away with you, boy!” he said. “But it’s the way I’d expect you to act,” he added shyly.

“Someone’s got to stake me, or I can’t develop that claim,” said I, “and it had better be you than anyone I know.” The man’s quaint habit of secrecy about his most vital affairs had infected me, and I had never told him about my background in the East.

“All right; I guess I’ll take a whirl with you,” announced Marcus at last. “If I can keep any of my money out of the maw of that damn paper company!”

So was born the partnership which developed and operated the Upper Case claim on Hayden Hill. For of course, when we came to name it, we used a printing term. Let me tell

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here, once for all, the story of the Upper Case, simple but typical. Hayden Hill was "spotted." The ore, as many learned by hard experience, lay in pockets, great and small, and not the most experienced geologists could prophesy their lay from the surface conformation. The Hayden and Croly tunnel tapped one of these pockets—nearly the greatest. Our shaft was only fifty yards away, yet never, from the morning when we turned the first shovelful of earth until the night when its mouth was boarded up as a dangerous prospect hole, did it turn up an ounce of paying ore. After we had sunk to a depth below which carbonates had never yet been discovered on Hayden Hill, we abandoned it as a bad job. Then a company with a theory that a deep sulphide formation underlay the whole hill made offers for some of the unproductive or worked-out claims. We sold for just enough money to pay Marcus back what he had sunk in it, plus a block of stock. I am keeping the stock yet—as a souvenir.

But Marcus, when we had patched him up with court-plaster from the drug-store, displayed a nobler emotion than greed of gold or hate of man. "She's the biggest story that ever came out in this camp!" he said. "We've got to spread ourselves! We're making history, boy. When Cottonwood is capital of the State, this issue of the *Courier* will be framed in the State House for a souvenir! You know the story. Write it for all you're worth. Had any dinner? Neither have I—I've been through a hard morning. Johnnie, run over to Huffaker's and bring up a tray of grub. Now rustle!" Forthwith Marcus, his head on one side to favour his damaged eye, began setting up his editorial on the future of the camp. No sooner was Johnnie returned than Marcus had another idea, which expressed itself in action. He began rummaging through an old box of cuts, relics of some former *Courier* from which, whenever these personages broke into our "telegraph" news, we used to pluck out stock portraits of General Grant, Henry Ward Beecher, Dwight L. Moody and other current celebrities. Marcus returned to the desk bearing one such cut.

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"Don't that look a little like your friend Mr. Hayden?" he asked.

"Why, that's Tilton of the Beecher-Tilton trial," I said.

"Sure it is," replied Marcus. "But if we trim his nose and whiskers a little and take off some of his hair, he'll do. There's an engraver down to Arnstein and Cohen's. Johnnie, go out and fetch him. Tell Mr. Cohen I need him bad." So Arnstein and Cohen's engraver came with his tools, and together we metamorphosed Tilton into Buck. The finished portrait had a Byzantine effect in eyes, whiskers which started thick and ended as a weak fringe, and a conspicuous scar across the right cheek—where the engraver's tool had slipped. Still, it did bear a faint, crude resemblance to James Buchanan Hayden, Discoverer of the New Bonanza. Intoxicated with artistic creation, we plucked General John A. Logan from the box of cuts. By blending the ends of his enormous moustache into the shading of his cheeks and trimming his hair, we produced a counterfeit resemblance of Croly, joint locator of the New Bonanza. Searching the later files of the *Courier*, I find that these portraits, slightly retouched now and then, did occasional service for years. In 1881, for example, James Buchanan Hayden figured as Guiteau, the Cowardly Assassin of President Garfield.

My big story finished, Marcus sent me forth to get an interview with Buck. Estimating the probabilities, I repaired straight to Huffaker's. My judgment had led me aright. Already, the first storey of the hotel was finished and occupied; and the dining-room and bar, as I approached, radiated light, babble and song. I pushed inside. Buck, still in his red flannel shirt, his overalls tucked into his muddy boots, was dining in state. Heading a long table heaped with food, pinnacled with champagne-bottles, he had seated Jim Huffaker at his right, Isidore Cohen at his left. The company was pieced out with "mining men," mining brokers, even Taylor the banker—the financial aristocracy of the camp. I had scarcely stepped through the door when Buck saw me and rose to his feet, roaring boisterous welcome.

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"Gents!" he cried, rapping for order with the butt of an empty bottle. "There's the mascot! There's the tenderfoot that brought me luck! Step up, kid, and let 'em see you. Got next claim to the Aldeb'ran——" Occasionally Buck dropped a syllable. "He's going to be rich too! Jim, 's my credit still good? All right. Wine again!"

So I was surrounded, congratulated, welcomed prematurely to the financial aristocracy. A place was made for me at the board; I was plied with champagne and questions. Buck expanded; told how the yellow sand clogging the rocker had looked suspicious to him from the first, and pulled himself up to compliment the acumen of Shorty. Out of sight, Shorty had dropped almost out of mind. He had proceeded from his claim straight to Pearl Street, there to celebrate in his own way.

While the false light of adulation tickled my vanity as well as my sense of humour, I had no desire to sit with the mighty that evening; life had moved so fast since Buck's messenger woke me as to yield no opportunity for seeing Constance. On the plea of urgent business necessity, I got Buck away from the table, dragged him past the clutching, congratulating hands, shut him up in a back room of Huffaker's bar, and interviewed him.

His opinion on the future of Cottonwood Camp—the reading-matter which the *Courier* really wanted out of Buck—was all of a pattern with what I might have written had I never talked with him at all. Cottonwood would have lynched anyone that night who expressed a doubt that our camp was the new El-Dorado, rock-ribbed and eternal, doubtless a better proposition a hundred years from now than she is to-day. (I am quoting here from Marcus Handy's leading editorial.) What really interested me was the part of our conversation which I did not print.

"Well, Buck," I said, "now that you're rich, what are you going to do? Go East and settle down?"

"East, hell!" exclaimed Buck. "These here Rockies is good enough for me!"

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"Here in Cottonwood?" I asked.

"Sure! Cert! What's the use of movin' to New York or Frisco when we're going to have New York right here?"

"And what then?" I asked. "What are you going to do with the money if you stay here?"

"Store-clothes and diamond studs," said Buck, "and a big house and a spanking team and a whirl at faro whenever I feel like it—and all that sort of thing," he added vaguely. Usually hard-headed, Buck had mixed his liquor with the excitement of that day, and was thinking only in fragments. "And more mines!" he went on. "Going to just about own this here camp!"

"Buck," I warned from the depths of my Yankee caution, "it's certain you have a very rich mine. There may be a million dollars down there, enough at any rate so that you might invest it and——"

"Sure I'm going to invest it!" said Buck. "Don't think I'm going to blow it *all* in, do you? In mines. I'll own this here camp before I'm through——"

"But mines are a matter of luck," I interrupted.

"Cert. And my luck has turned," replied Buck simply. I had no time for further argument, because a new delegation of prominent citizens was pounding at the door; and Buck, lapped in such joys as he had never before known, was in no mood for introspection.

I hastened to Mrs. Barnaby's—late. Glancing through the door, I saw that the place at the head of the table was cleared; Constance had supped and departed. I went round to the sleeping-tent and called. At the sound of my voice she came running forth into the twilight, both hands outstretched.

"I hear that you have struck it," she said, "and oh, I'm glad!"

"I've struck it only constructively," said I, "but as for Buck, there's no doubt about him." And I sketched that day's adventures. At Buck's generosity in looking out for me, she seemed to glow.

"I hope it won't spoil him," she said. "Of course it won't

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spoil you. No," she added, her eyes glimmering up at me through the twilight. "No, you're not the kind that spoils—under any circumstances."

I went again all a-tremble; except for memory of that afternoon in the gulch, I should have lost my self-control again. She seemed to perceive my emotion; for she said quickly:

"We mustn't talk here by night this way—people gossip—I've had to make it a rule not to see men callers in the evening. Good night, Robert; I hope your claim makes a million!" and was gone through the tent-flap. Had I yielded to my impulses, I should have torn the canvas into shreds.

Reading page-proofs that night, I glanced up at Marcus, who was locking a form.

"Aren't you going to refer to the—the McGrath episode?" I asked.

"Nope!" said Marcus cheerfully. "Crowded out to make room for more interesting matter. By the way, boy—don't you go taking this matter up with Marshal McGrath. Next time he'll shoot, and I don't want to lose my best and only reporter. Just keep out of his way. We're going to get the criminal news for the *Courier* from others than the appointed authorities."

"Is the campaign for a municipal government abandoned, then?" I asked, and held my breath for the answer. I esteemed Marcus, and did not like to think that he lacked nerve.

"No," he replied. "But when I cut my wolf loose again, old hoss, he's going to bite!" To which cryptic utterance he put a period with a resounding blow of his maul on the block.

The days passed, bringing the advance-guard of a new rush to Cottonwood Camp. Again we were crowded beyond all possibility of accommodating our pilgrims and strangers. But now, instead of sleeping on the floors of the saloons or the billiard-tables of the Comstock Lode, the overflow lay like fallen leaves along the creek. Blankets, in this period, rented for the ordinary price of a hotel-room. Even then, there were not enough to go round. Once, indeed, we came near to

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famine. For two days there were no dressed meat nor canned goods in town; but the arrival of a hunting-party with three wagon-loads of newly killed elk and deer relieved one shortage; and a freight-train of assorted groceries, hastily summoned from Denver, mitigated the other.

What with the rush of news and the preliminaries to sinking our shaft, I was working sixteen hours a day; I saw Mrs. Deane alone only in fugitive moments. For a time, I had the feeling that Marcus was shirking his job. During whole evenings, he absented himself from the office. Once he borrowed my horse. When he returned, I noted that although the weather had been clear for two days the legs and belly of my roan were caked with dried mud; he must have forded a river.

"Lot of speed in that bronc," commented Marcus. "Streak of Arab blood or something. He sure can go!" But concerning the object or destination of his ride, he said nothing.

At about this time Mike, the day bartender of the Silver Dollar saloon, began to loom up from the hazy mists of my general acquaintance. For some weeks now, he had held a loose connexion with the *Courier* as a solicitor of printing jobs on commission and a gatherer of small news-items. The Silver Dollar, which stood just where the glories of Main Street encountered the cheap, open brothels of Pearl Street, had a hard name in camp. Rumour called it head-quarters for the thug element. As for Mike—I never knew his other name—he was a small, hatchet-faced man with a dead, inscrutable eye and the appearance in his street-clothes of a respectable and somewhat self-effacing mechanic. He said little at any time, and that little in a voice which sucked the words in through a set of narrow teeth slanted backward like an anaconda's. He used to bring his information as rough notes, written in a business hand whose Spencerian flourishes contrasted oddly with its grammatical atrocities. Only by a process of painful cross-examination could I extract the human lights which made the story.

When we severed relations with the Marshal's office, Mike

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became at once invaluable. Our necessary criminal news we got from his reports; and we never missed an essential item. Twice, after I had drawn from him his budget of information, he stepped over to Marcus, spoke a quiet word; they retired then to the space behind the printing-press—the only private place in our office—and talked in whispers. Except for the uncomfortable feeling of being on the outside and a touch of amusement at my editor's mania for dramatic secrecy, I gave little thought to these conferences.

One night Marcus did not come back from dinner. Mike, reporting at eight o'clock as was his habit, laid down his budget of notes and gave his usual unilluminating explanations. He had only two unimportant hold-ups and a case of assault and battery; I put aside his notes to "work up" when I had finished the "telegraph" news. But Mike did not at once depart. For fifteen minutes he stood round the office, shifting from one foot to the other and asking faintly at intervals when I expected the Boss to come back.

"Say," he said at last, "I got business that won't wait. Give this note to the boss as soon as he comes in, will you? It's important."

I took the piece of folded copy-paper, slipped it into my pocket. A minute later, in fear that I might forget it, I laid it on the desk before me. I was working furiously that night. The telegraph matter finished, I turned to Mike's items. Absently, I unfolded the note with the rest, read it over at one glance of the eye before I realized what I was doing.

"Proved that somebody in town informs when they is monney shipments," it read. "Regular sistem. . . . May have interesting facts to-morrow."

I folded the note quickly, put it back into my pocket. When Marcus arrived half an hour later I gave it to him, wondering if the honourable and discreet thing was to admit my mistake or to keep silence. I decided on silence. Of course, I would keep his secret; and to let him know that I knew would only disturb him. A little guiltily, however, I watched him read it. He whistled, caught up his hat and hurried through the

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door, to be gone for another half-hour. The loose ends of this affair began to knot themselves together in my mind. Mike, of course, was a detective, admirably placed in the Silver Dollar, admirably concealed by the device of giving him desultory employment on the *Courier*. But was he Marcus Handy's man alone—or whose?

The next day brought another tiny, significant incident—like a jet of steam from a verdant and blossoming earth, which indicates the volcano awakening to eruption underneath. But whereas my deductions from Mike's notes revealed to me part at least of the hidden truth, the meaning of this at the time escaped me.

Through a still summer afternoon, with the great mountain above seeming very near, I had ridden out to Hayden Hill. Ostensibly, I made this journey in order to report progress on our development work to Marcus; in reality I went to gloat. That piece of earth was mine—not a gift or inheritance, like the fruits of life I had enjoyed hitherto, but product of my own enterprise. As miners will, I was already discounting my stroke of luck, attributing my good fortune to my native acumen.

Across the site of our old placer diggings stretched now a bridge of unseasoned logs, the needles still green on their roughly trimmed stumps of branches. Over it, a six-mule team was hauling a load of buckets, rope, timbers, mine-hardware. Everywhere the red-and-yellow dumps of new prospect holes slashed the sage-green hill-side. The rather large cabin on the next claim down-stream had passed from a private residence to a public institution. A shrewd saloon-keeper, newly arrived, had seen his chance for business with the owners, the prospectors and the mere sight-seers crowding to Hayden Hill, had rented the cabin at rates which returned its owners much greater revenue than their dwindling placer claim, had opened the Big Bonanza Saloon.

At the door of the Big Bonanza Saloon stood hitched a team of matched coal-black Morgan horses, the silver mountings of their harness reflected in the glossy polish of their

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hides. The carriage behind them seemed, from the glint of its varnish, the unspotted newness of its yellow trimmings, to be out on its maiden journey. It was what we called in those times and altitudes a "racing-surrey." The sporting chromos of that period, now just beginning to find place in collections, picture Commodore Vanderbilt driving at a dangerous pace of eighteen miles an hour in such a vehicle, all loose objects save his tropic growth of side-whiskers blown backward by the wind of his terrific speed. As I pulled up to admire this equipage, its owner strode from the Big Bonanza, chewing an unlighted cigar. He unhitched and mounted to the seat. He wore checked trousers as new as the paint of his carriage, as tight as the hides of his team, a black "diagonal" coat with binding an inch wide, a low, loud waistcoat revealing a white, hard and glossy shirt-front, wherein gleamed two diamond studs. Above that were a round felt hat, a set of whiskers evidently but that morning trimmed by a too expert barber, and the countenance of—Buck! I was forced to look twice before I made sure of that and hailed him.

"Hello!" he cried as I approached; and then, somewhat sheepishly: "What think of the new shell?"

"It's great. It's swell," I said, suppressing my smiles. "You must be cashing in!"

"Nope!" replied Buck. "Not till next week. First shipment started to Denver yesterday. Don't have to pay. Everybody gives me tick." Then, reverting a little shyly to the fascinating subject of his clothes:

"Since the boys elected me President of the Hayden Hill Mine-owners' Association I kinder feel I ought to dog up a little!" He withdrew the unlighted cigar from his mouth, spat a loose piece of wrapper from his lips. "Tryin' to break myself of chawin'!" he remarked. "Jim Huffaker said a dry cigar was the best way. But it ain't very satisfyin'."

We drifted into the gossip of the day. Buck's claim—he had named it the Aldeberan, after that star which so gripped his imagination—was developing beyond all expectations. Still the ore-body seemed to widen out; and still it grew richer.

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One sack which had gone down to Denver assayed eight hundred dollars to the ton. Shorty had been shirking his share of the work. "Drunk a heap," said Buck. "And then there's that girl from Red Nell's house. . . ." Two of the other claims had already reached "signs." "You'll break into it yourself any day, now," pronounced Buck. Hadn't been any symptoms of claim-jumping yet. Probably because the crooks in town knew what kind of men had located on Hayden Hill. "That was just blind luck," he commented. "The right kind of men got locations here. Had a mine-owners' association before they'd scratched ground. And we'll stand together, too. Anybody that tries anything funny up here is monkeyin' with a buzz-saw. I guess the camp's next in order." He paused a moment.

"Sacramento diggings," he added in a low, even tone.

"What?" I asked. Buck was seldom cryptic.

"Guess you ain't a member of our lodge," laughed Buck; and at once changed the subject to the shortage of mine-hardware.

If I thought at all of this curious phrase, it was to reflect with amusement that Buck had probably joined by now every secret order represented in Cottonwood.

CHAPTER XVI

I GO MAD

I LOOKED up to realize that if I kept straight on, I must pass round the County Jail. I had taken that course from the suburbs, where I had gone to look for a freighter with a bear-story, in pure absent-mindedness born of a troubled mind. The dazzling interest of my dual job as reporter for the *Courier* and owner of the Upper Case mine had saved me, all this time, from that sickness of the spirit which afflicts unhappy lovers. But sometimes when I was alone—as to-night—the hopeless misery of my situation and the uncertainty of the path I was following came over me in a wave of black, tormenting misery.

I hesitated just a moment. Not since the day when he beat up Marcus Handy had I encountered Marshal McGrath face to face. Subconsciously, I had been dreading the meeting. Of course, I should look through him, as though he were not there. Then, probably, the Marshal would taunt me—or Marcus, which would come to the same thing. If I answered him in kind, he would probably shoot. I had no illusions as to my chances in a pistol-match with the Marshal. Moreover, Marcus had again and again implored me not to hunt trouble in that quarter. On the other hand, if I failed to answer in kind I should lose all standing; should be known simply as a tenderfoot that backed down. And by now my growing position in camp had become sweet, so young was I.

In the shadow of a cabin which blocked the approaches from the hill-side to the jail, I hesitated, my pride disputing with my prudence. I glanced at the jail. Brilliant light flooding

through its front window illuminated Marshal McGrath's rocking-chair. It stood empty; there was only a remote chance of meeting him. I noted, on the hazy edge of the belt of light, two male figures standing close together as though in conversation, and the outlines of a horse. But neither was the Marshal. All this in the mere pause of an interrupted step.

I was about to advance, certain that the chance of meeting my enemy was remote, when the two men stepped out into the belt of light. One, though his face lay in shadow, I recognized as the talkative Charlie Meek. The light shone full on the face of the other. It was a comely countenance; my first, photographic glimpse recorded a brow running almost without break into a straight regular nose; from beneath his black slouch hat, now pushed back on his head, emerged a tuft of curling blond hair. Then he turned from profile to full face, and smiled at some remark of Charlie Meek. And I saw that a loose mouth marred his comeliness.

I had lifted my foot to step forth and boldly to pass the jail, when he stooped, picked up the reins, led his horse's head and foreshoulders into the belt of light. The motion stirred in me a faint memory which held me, searching my brain, to the spot. The face was new. Yet that motion reminded me of something significant, dramatic, buried perplexingly in the depths of memory. Charlie, talking in low tones over his shoulder, thrust his key into the lock of the jail. A forward motion of the horse blotted out his figure. The stranger mounted; the horse swung round backward and sideward as an independent steed will. On his buckskin flank lay a white marking—shaped like the upper half of a pear, the head and shoulders of a veiled woman.

That was the horse I had seen in the bushes after the robbery of the Cottonwood stage! And the rider . . . when I saw him before, he was masked. But that motion, that figure were the same. . . .

Twice it has been given me to hear from members of my family who do not lie the narrative of an apparition of the absent at the moment of death. In both cases, the aftermath

was the same. As the years went on, they who had seen the vision doubted, wondering if it were not a trick of memory, excited imagination. But at the time they knew. This was the veritable soul of Susan or Martha, come to announce her passing. So with me at this moment. I no more doubted this identification of a mere motion and carriage of the body than I would have doubted my mother. As certainly as though he had confessed it, I knew that this was a man whom I had seen lying along the rock covering the stage passengers, whom I had seen mounting that same horse with the pear-shaped marking.

Charlie stepped into the jail; the rider sent his horse at a walk through the belt of shadow into the light of Main Street. At a run I rounded the corner after him. I caught up, slowed down just behind him, and followed. Still at a walk, he was weaving through the late traffic. Before the Black Jack he stopped, threw the horse's reins over a pin of the hitching-rail, walked a little unsteadily through the door. I waited until he was gone, and made a swift inspection of his mount. I had not been mistaken—a rangy American horse, buckskin in colour, and with that distinguishing mark on his flank. I entered. There stood the rider at one end of the crowded bar, tilting into himself a glass of whisky. I pushed into the convivial knot next to him, watched him furtively. His hand, as he reached toward his waistcoat pocket to pay, missed twice; then came down hard as he rang his silver dollar on the bar. His grey eye, as he turned it casually a moment in my direction, seemed filmed. He had “been drinking,” as we expressed it in that day—not yet drunk, but on the way. His face, seen now in full light, was less comely than at first glance. There lay a kind of blackness under the smooth, young blond skin. He was dressed like a miner or a prospector; but he wore his rough freize coat, his corduroy trousers, his top-boots and his blue flannel shirt with a touch of jauntiness; his trousers seemed draped above his boot-tops rather than tucked into them. He gathered up his change, stabbed it into his pocket, rolled upstairs to the gambling-room.

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When after a discreet interval I followed him, he had just staked a twenty-dollar gold piece at roulette. I joined the group of spectators, who stood watching with fascinated interest the descending whirl of the wheel. He lost; the dealer's hand raked in his coin. He was reaching again to his pocket, when from the spectators a man stepped up beside him as though to play; but instead laid a hand stealthily on his arm. This was a tall man; I caught a glimpse of a full, black beard. The smaller man turned angrily, then froze for a second in position. Some signal, evidently, had passed from eye to eye; a movement of the larger man's beard showed that he was speaking; though I could not catch even the sound of the words through the babble of night in the Black Jack. The smaller man's hand went away from his pocket. He pushed through the crowd to the stairs. I followed him closely as, with only a second of hesitation when he passed the bar, he walked on out of doors. Through the front windows of the bar-room I watched him emerge, expecting that he would mount and intending to mark the direction in which he rode. But he did not advance toward his horse. A moment he stood as though undecided; then turned to the right and strode rapidly down Main Street.

Thrilled with the adventure of shadowing a man, exulting with the thought of the scoop I was going to score for the *Courier*, I shot as unostentatiously as possible through the door of the Black Jack, followed. Remembering what I had heard concerning the art of shadowing, I was prepared, if he once turned and saw me, to cross the street and continue my observation from the crowd on the other side. Thrilled as I was, I felt amusement too. This man-hunting was one of the adventures on which I used to dream when I was a little boy. But he never looked back. As straight as a homing pigeon to some invisible mark, he walked on with short, quick steps which rolled only occasionally. For a moment I lost him in the congested crowd before Myers' Variety Theatre. When I had crammed my way through that, I picked him up again at the head of Main Street. There he turned to the right to-

ward the Addition, the route which I followed every day to my meals. That was odd—did he live in the Addition? Had the enactors of this stage robbery dwelt so near me—and Constance—all this time?

Past Mrs. Barnaby's he strode, and stopped dead. Here was a contingency I had not foreseen. If I went on, I should pass him and forfeit my usefulness as a shadow. If I too stopped and he saw me standing—he would suspect. Hastily, I dodged into the shade of the big tent. I waited for a few seconds, then ventured a cautious look round the corner. He was nowhere in sight. Just above Mrs. Barnaby's the street threw off a side-trail running up the hill. Doubtless, he had taken that. I sped on tiptoe to the other end of the tent. There he was again—but he was not taking the trail. He had stopped before the little tent where lodged Mrs. Barnaby and Mrs. Deane.

"Hoo-hoo!" he was calling, gently.

I dropped to the ground, less from caution than from a weakness in all my limbs.

The edging of light along the tent-flap became a triangle. Someone had emerged. It was Constance Deane. I could not see her face in the moonlight, but did I not know the tripping move and trim figure of her, the poise of the bare head? Surely, he had mistaken the place! She would tell him so, and go back. But she laid a hand on his arm, led him a little way from the tent; they stood talking in whispers whose vocalization did not reach me; talking with swift gestures. Now I could see her face in the moonlight, upturned toward him. . . . Again she laid her hand upon his arm . . . she who had told me that she would not receive men in the evening . . . she who had kissed me . . . she who had been on the robbed stage. . . . In letters of red fire that phrase of Mike's note danced before my eyes . . . "Somebody in town informs" . . .

Was this Mr. Deane? . . . She had been curious, over-curious, about affairs in the camp . . . and Eldridge was agent for the stage company . . . Hutchins worked in the

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bank . . . and I . . . I had told her everything I knew. . . . She had advised me to leave her, to go away. . . . Ah, but she knew I wouldn't. . . . She had played with me. . . . Oh, but it was impossible . . . I would rush upon her and beg her to tell me it was impossible . . . no, unwittingly, I was an eavesdropper, a spy . . . I had not even the consolation of a dignified position. . . .

Suddenly the group in the moonlight broke. She had darted back inside the tent. The man stood still a moment as though hesitant; then turned, disappeared round the boarding-tent, emerged a moment later into the moonlight, retracing his course. I followed no longer. When he was gone out of sight, I lay there, my eyes on the dim blob of light which was the tent, the brilliant slash which was the opening of the flap—lay and dug my fingers into the ground and panted. Suddenly the light in the tent went out. I rose and stumbled blindly down the hill to Main Street.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WOLF BITES

WHEN I came back to a semblance of reason and sanity, I was looking down, from a dump of Liverpool Hill, on the streaks of blobbed light which marked Cottonwood Camp. My right hand ached and smarted. Numbly, incuriously, I inspected it by the moonlight. Oh, yes—that happened when I struck my clenched fist against the doorway of the Black Jack. Since I saw my betrayal I had been wandering through camp, aimlessly and insanely. I had kindled in my heart and soul every invidious emotion. My conviction, formed so hastily as I watched that couple in the moonlight, had set, frozen. There was no hope, no faintest doubt. Stern, dramatic plans of action had floated into my imagination to be blown away by others just as violent and fanciful. I would go and accuse her to her face—tell her what she was and what she had done to me. No, I could not do that. My pride had been seared enough already; besides, what would she care? I would leave the camp to-night and never again see her or the spot where she had tormented me, used me. But even while I imagined this, I knew that I could not abandon the game half played. I would follow him, her accomplice and lover, to the ends of the earth; and when I found him I would kill him as a man should. I would kill myself—I had the weapon there on my hip. Even was there a terrible vision of Constance Deane's tender throat gurgling to flabby quiet in my clenched hands. . . . It was this sudden, primeval lust for murder which, imparting an unnatural energy to all my members, finally drove me on the run up Liverpool

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Hill. Altitude and the limitations of the body had their way with me at last; my breath gave out; I dropped down on the rough prisms of the dump, exhausted.

Now, so many years older, so much better educated in life, I know this black, violent mood for what it was—the explosion of forces which had long been mounting within me. For weeks my inhibitions of character and training had been holding down the hatchway against a dangerous gas of the spirit—aroused sex, teased, tricked by circumstances, alternately excited and baffled. During the black night of primeval force which followed, I was a stranger to myself. It was as though God, reaching out His strong hand, had shuffled all my faculties, and as though they had rearranged themselves into new, hideous, grotesque groupings and forms. To this day I look back and wonder if it could have been Robert Gilson who thought and imagined and acted those sinister rôles.

Yet, oddly, through it all I kept one tiny impulse of responsibility. I had no sooner settled into my state of relative calm than I remembered the *Cottonwood Courier*, struggling on toward press-hour without me. Marcus Handy at least had done me no wrong. I owed him the courtesy of decent resignation. I rose, started down Liverpool Hill in a leaden mood of profound but inactive melancholy.

Through the clear, carrying night air came the sound of a pistol-shot—two shots—a crackling fusillade. These sounds blew into a blaze the embers of my violent mood. The sense of dynamic power in the explosions, the imagination of the bullets with their terrific, satisfying punch into flesh or into wood, gave some devilish satisfaction to my nerves. Then the world of practical realities again flowed in upon me. This was no joy-fusillade of drunken miners or prospectors. The *tempo* was that of a general fight. Again, I broke into a run.

As I passed the straggling row of cabins which fringed the road leading into the foot of Main Street, I caught the noise of the crowds. It came in an irregular, roaring babble, quite unlike the ordinary rhythms of night in Cottonwood. And there was no music; something had muted the orchestras and

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bands. I rounded the curve toward the jail. Men were cinching saddles and mounting; a moment revealed by the swerve of a horse, in a moment concealed, stood the figure of Chris McGrath, one peremptory finger pointing a command.

A nondescript citizen stood with his hands in his pockets, regarding proceedings from the concealing shade of a slouch hat.

"Bank robbed!" he answered casually to my inquiry, and spat a stream into the gutter.

"But the shooting—anybody killed?" I panted.

"Three, I hears," he replied as casually.

Down the roadway of Main Street I pushed my way toward the bank—there was no room on the side-walks. All Cottonwood—clerks, faro-dealers, miners, tenderfoot, visitors, painted ladies—had rushed out of doors. In gesticulating knots stood the citizens of our town, talking it over. Fragmentary, expletive sentences, whetting my curiosity, snapped out of the babel—"got clean away—that's funny"—"five killed"—"gold shipment." Out of Main Street, three buildings from the bank, ran one of our straggling side-streets. It was jammed. The focus of interest seemed to be the back door of the bank. With hasty explanations of my identity, with much discourteous wiggling and pushing, I bucked my way forward. By the entrance stood two guards, their 45-calibre side-arms slung forward on their hips as though for instant action. Now and again they would shove back the too insistent crowds, and then resume their official pose.

"I'm the *Courier* reporter," I panted. "How many were killed?"

"Nobody, as I saw," responded the guard.

"But there was shooting!" I objected.

"Damn bad shooting," snipped the guard. "I wasn't shooting," he added as though clearing himself from some dreadful implication.

"How much did they get?"

The guard hesitated.

"Ask the boss," he said finally. Then I was aware that

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the back window was opened a few inches, that a voice had whistled and called my name. I leaned down to the space between sash and sill, and was looking into the lean face of Mr. Taylor. Since I became a mine-owner, a prospect as a heavy depositor, my youthful identity had swum into his ken.

"Better go to your office, Gilson," he said. "Handy has been looking for you."

"Did they kill anyone—how much did they get?" I asked.

"No one hurt—but Handy will tell you what to say about all that!" replied Mr. Taylor enigmatically, and closed the window.

As I threaded among the dark cabins, sheds, rude warehouses which made a maze of the alley behind the bank, I saw that the crowd was thinning out. Just then, a band down the street gave its preliminary roll, struck up a march-tune; Cottonwood, the fires of excitement already dying out, had resumed its normal night life. But not quite, I reflected as I came up the side-street toward the *Courier*. Considering that it offered no lures of pleasure, it was singularly crowded for that time of night. Men were standing in knots; only they did not gesticulate, and if they spoke at all it was in low whispers. The excitement had abated only on the surface, I felt. Deep below ran a sense of tension. . . . I was hardly surprised when from the doorway of the *Courier* a stranger stepped forward, laid his hand on a scabbard swung forward from his hip, and said:

"You can't come in here!"

"But I work here!" said I.

"Wait a minute," he replied, and disappeared. An instant later the keenly lined silhouette of Marcus became visible against the light.

"It's all right—come along!" he shot out in his executive voice.

I entered. Marcus, his sleeves rolled up, his store-clothes protected by the ink-spattered apron of his trade, his mallet in hand, stood at the stone. I had never seen his eye so bright.

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"Where the hell have you been?" he inquired. Somehow, my preternaturally sensitive tentacles of the mind felt the spirit of his inquiry; and I wondered if he knew. I answered nothing. The search for an excuse brought up the blackness of the past two hours which excitement had momentarily dissipated; if I had tried to speak, I would have choked. Marcus, indeed, gave me no time to answer.

"Well, rustle!" he growled. "Did you get anything on that bank robbery?"

"Not much. Taylor told me to see you."

"Just as well," replied Marcus. "You take this story exactly as I lay it out for you." With news to write, I was no longer his partner; he had become the boss, executive and exacting. "Don't touch it up too much. Make it straight and cold. All ready? Go! The Bank of Cottonwood was robbed last night"—as morning newspaper men must, he was dating the event one day behind. "Let yourself out a little in the introduction. Call it an insolent performance or something like that. Oh, yes, and say: 'due to the inefficiency of the administration which has made this camp a paradise for crooks, road-agents and sure-thing men.' Or words to that effect. Then the straight stuff. At ten-forty-five, a fusillade of shots from the alley back of Main Street announced the daring crime. A few minutes before that time, four horsemen rode quietly up to the entrance of the alley behind the bank, and left their horses. One horse, it was noticed by the spectators, was a buckskin"—here Marcus hesitated in his steady flood of language, then went on more slowly: "a buckskin with a peculiar white spot on his flank had been noticed about the camp all evening. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that a few minutes before the crime occurred a prominent citizen, passing down the Liverpool Hill trail, saw a group of men treating the hind quarters of a buckskin horse with something suspiciously resembling yellow white-wash"—it was well that Marcus here paused again in his narrative; for the rush of blood through tense channels deafened

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and blinded me. But my ears and eyes cleared; and Marcus was proceeding: "No, I guess you'd better leave that out. Not a word of that—or the colour of any horse.

"Owing to the danger of highway robbery ever present in this camp, the Bank of Cottonwood has been taking unusual precautions in moving its outgoing shipments of bullion and its incoming shipments of coined gold and currency. The transfer to and from the vaults of the bank took place usually after dark. Last night a consignment of"—a pause again—"which is reported to have been gold coin, was due to arrive at about ten-thirty, an hour when most of the revellers in camp would be in the dance-hall and varieties, or wooing the elusive goddess of chance." While one half of my inner spirit raged and stormed, the other half, keeping calm judgment, tempered curiosity, noted with amusement that Marcus was casting his narrative in the professional jargon. "The bank was all ready for the shipment. The police department had been notified." Another pause. "Unfortunately, our efficient guardians of life and property—get in some sarcastic shot like that—were waiting at the wrong entrance to the alley, and did not participate in subsequent events. H. A. Taylor, president of the bank, and Horace Hutchins, his teller, themselves acting as guards, waited at the back door. At the appointed hour, the shipment arrived in a Democrat wagon, driven by John F. Gruder with—what the blazes are his initials?—oh, yes, Pete Hannan—as guard. Drawing up the wagon and dismounting, they prepared to unload the money, which was enclosed in two locked strong-boxes. Having reached the bank safely, the guardians of the treasure relaxed their vigilance—put in something like that. Anyhow, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Hutchins, instead of remaining on guard, started to help. At the moment when they had their hands full, four men sprang from a doorway in a cabin which faces the back door of the bank. Before either the guards or the bank officials could get to their guns, each felt a muzzle poked into his ribs. To resist would have been to invite certain death. With muttered words of command, the road-agents backed their victims

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against the door, took away their guns. Then, while two of the bandits kept them covered, the others rapidly removed the treasure-boxes to the entrance of the alley, loaded them on to their horses. So well had the criminals apparently informed themselves of the bank's habits that a spectator who noticed this act without comprehending its significance said that the saddles of their animals were fitted with rope slings. The operation took but a minute. When this was done, the pair who had been covering the bank officials backed away to the entrance of the alley, still covering their victims. With a final warning that they would shoot the first man who emerged, they swung into their saddles and rode away in the darkness.

"Pluckily disregarding the warnings of the bandits, the banker and his assistants hurried to recover their guns, which had been tossed into the dark space between two cabins. Mr. Taylor was the first to succeed. He ran to the entrance of the alley, and turned loose at the bandits as they disappeared in moonlight. They returned the fire at long range, fortunately with no effect.

"The police were at once notified. The crime, as before stated, occurred at about ten-forty-five. At eleven-thirty, the posse which Marshal McGrath immediately started to form was still engaged in interesting conversation at the jail. Cinching a saddle is an operation which takes time—or something sarcastic, better than that. Rub it into them."

The cool, working half of me spoke now; it was as though I heard someone else pronounce the words:

"How much money did they get?"

Unaccountably, the strained, illuminated face of Marcus broke into a smile. Then it grew quiet, considering.

"I guess we'll leave that out," he said. "And end like this—take it down as I say it:

"The aftermath of this affair will doubtless be known to all before this issue of the *Courier* reaches its readers.'"

I could endure it no longer. That side of me which had been burning all night in the dark flames of my own inner hell burst to the surface. It manifested itself in violent physical

action as I struck the point of my pencil into the table and cried:

"Why are you keeping me in the dark? Why am I on the outside of all this?" A dozen circumstances had come together in my mind—the mysterious absences of Marcus, the hints of secret events underlying that bank robbery, the operations of Mike the Bartender, the guard at the door of the *Courier*, this last, cryptic sentence. Under it all flamed a deeper, fouler, more tormenting misery. Someone had informed the bandits as to the very hour when the treasure would be delivered at the bank. Someone had informed them as to the very character of its packing. Someone . . . numbly I could feel the nails digging into my clenched palms.

And the face of Marcus Handy took on a curious expression. Almost, he looked ashamed. He dropped his eyes to the stone.

"Sorry, I can't tell you now, kid," he said hesitantly. "Right sorry I can't. You've always played square with me. But wait until we've gone to press. Then I'll tell you, if you sure want to know. Now, for God's sake, get to work. Shove over your takes to the printers as fast as you write them."

Had Marcus replied to my outburst with his accustomed energy and authority, I do not know what I might have done. But this touch of sentiment served to cool and steady me. My working side took hold again. Furiously, I ripped through the story, the printers taking away the uncorrected copy as I wrote. However, I noticed dimly certain irregularities in the night routine of our office. Marcus was busy at the cases of job-type, for example. This task completed, he fluttered over the half-completed form of the front page. I heard parleys at the door; evidently, the guard was still turning visitors away. One man, however, was permitted to pass—Cohen the jeweller. He held a whispered conference with Marcus over the stone, nodded, departed hastily. Marcus was keeping the front page open for my story of the robbery. I had scarcely finished when he set the last take into place, inserted a filler, locked the form. And now my hot, black impatience surged again.

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"You said you'd tell me——" I cried from my desk.

"Wait till she's run off," replied Marcus. "Keep workin'. Start a column of telegraph news. We'll need it. There may be damn little work done in this office to-morrow—to-day——" he corrected himself; for the hands of our old station-clock pointed to half past one. Again I forced myself to work. Then the press began its rickety clang; and Johnnie, the office-boy, as was his routine, laid the wet, unfolded sheet upon my desk.

My eye flew mechanically to my own story; then was deflected by a curious typographical feature, unique in the *Cottonwood Courier*. Sprinkled over the front page, a "door-mat" to each separate item, ran a single legend, repeated again and again in assorted job-type, emphasized with a hand from our box of cuts:



SACRAMENTO DIGGINGS.

Those words—where had I heard them? Memory worked in a blinding flash. It was the phrase Buck had slipped to me so casually that day by the claim. A faint perception of the truth crept into my mind, opening the way for horrible considerations. . . . Marcus stood over me, his face seeming to struggle with conflicting emotions, among which the chief was embarrassment.

"Nobody will be leaving the *Courier* for half an hour or so," he said. "I guess I'm betrayin' no essential secrets if I tell you some things." He hesitated, and then, as though thrashing round the edges of the subject, he added:

"My fault at first that you didn't know. I like to play a lone hand. Then afterward——" He hesitated. And I burst out again:

"Why have I been left on the outside?" My voice must have rung disagreeably, for Marcus coloured an instant as though with contagion of anger, that died out before he answered hesitantly:

"When we formed—a certain organization—there was one party objected——"

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"You mean," I said, coming out brutally with my conjectures, "when you formed a Vigilance Committee?"

Marcus gave a slow nod, then a slight, almost suspicious start.

"How did you know?"

I pointed to the legend sprinkling the front page of the *Courier*. "That—I take it for granted it's your signal for action—and the guard at the door and other things I've seen. I'm not entirely a fool, perhaps," I added resentfully.

"No," said Marcus in a mollifying tone, "I figured you'd read the signs."

"Well—go on——" I snapped.

"There was a certain party objected to you. Nobody's doubted your squareness," he added, "but it was a delicate question, sort of. You see—we've watched everything closer than you know—he thought you were too—too well acquainted—with a certain other party that some think is not wholly above suspicion——" He stopped.

"Shorty—was it he who objected?" I asked with a flash of intuition.

"I'm not saying it wasn't," replied Marcus.

We were silent for a moment. Marcus never then or thereafter spoke the name of the person under suspicion. I knew. And an illogical, paradoxical feeling of necessity for protecting her—whose slender neck I had choked in imagination but an hour before—prompted me to ask:

"You don't intend—to harm her?"

"We don't harm ladies in this camp," said Marcus. "No. Not ladies. Though there's some women on Pearl Street nobody calls ladies who will be travelling to lower altitudes this morning. I want you to understand," he went on, shifting back to my personal considerations, "that it wasn't suspicion of you on the part of the boys. Just delicacy."

Just delicacy! The hot murder within me surged again. This was the crown of her offences. For I knew that it was more than delicacy—Marcus was simply trying awkwardly to be kind. Of course, if I had the secrets of the Vigilance Commit-

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tee I could not be trusted not to tell her . . . she had made a fool of me. . . . But Marcus was talking on; and I, for very shame and pride, was forcing myself to listen, even to make intelligent answers.

"By the time you or anyone else leaves this building, what we're going to do will be public property. I can trust you with most of the rest. That robbery didn't happen spontaneous-like. It was kind of managed."

"What?" I said sharply. "Was it just pretended?" A hope began to dawn in me; a hope which Marcus dashed with his next words:

"It was a robbery, all right. But you see—we needed a kind of dramatic episode—something that would get the whole camp het up, so we'd have public opinion with us. Some of the boys were for waiting—thought it was only a matter of time until something of the kind happened. I wasn't. We had the insiders up to the proper heat. They might cool off if we waited. The wrong people might get killed—and the wrong people hanged.

"So we arranged——"

"Who is 'we'?"

"Oh, Taylor and Cohen and your friend Buck Hayden and a few others—inside ring, you know—we arranged to inform certain parties just when and how that shipment would reach the bank. It worked. I was sure it would. Taylor and Hutchins showed damned good nerve. Consented to be held up. It was dangerous, of course. If anybody blundered into the picture, one of the bandits might get nervous with his trigger finger. Still, we were looking out pretty careful to see that nobody walked across the stage. There was a man hidden in every cabin along that back alley. We watched 'em when they came in—saw 'em mask—watched 'em come out. They were the people we were after—same outfit that held up the Cottonwood stage twice—same outfit that held up the Stonewall Jackson paymaster."

"Why did you let them go?"

"Dangerous, damn dangerous, to start a fight there. Prob-

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ably they'd have got Taylor and Hutchins first crack. Then everybody on Main Street would have rushed up to see what the shooting was about. We'd not only have killed a lot of innocent people, but we'd have spoiled the whole beauty of our performance and maybe turned public opinion against us. No, Taylor wouldn't stand for that."

"But he let them get away—with two boxes of gold?"

The face of Marcus broke into a smile and his sharp eyes twinkled.

"I suppose I'm talkin' too much with my mouth," he said. "But there's some things you can't resist. They got away with our hell-box—just that worn-out job-type that I junked last week. Shut up tight in two steel strong-boxes. Combination-locks. Can't be opened without explosives—we're takin' some risks of losin' our men. But when we do get them, there's no need of any decent citizen getting killed."

"And afterward?"

The smile went from his face, his expression set.

"Lynching," he said. "Trial before a regular miner's court. Open and above-board. . . . No masks. Our affair—Cottonwood City." Then, though I said nothing but only sat with my eyes on his face, he broke into self-justification:

"You'd shoot a rattlesnake, wouldn't you? You'd step on a tarantula! Which is better—to string up a set of bandits, or to let a lot more innocent citizens get killed?"

"And if you don't get them?"

"There'll probably be one lynching just the same!"

"Marshal McGrath?" I inquired, throwing out the most natural conjecture.

"Lord Almighty, no!" said Marcus. "That shooting fool! Though he may be among the missing by night," he added cryptically.

I paused before I asked my next significant question:

"Did you—did your people—watch them from the time they entered camp?"

"Yes," said Marcus. A moment of charged, electric silence, and he added:

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"You were watching one of them!"

I could get no voice to answer. My eyes still interlocked with his, I nodded.

"I'm sorry, boy," he said, softly for him.

"To hell with your sympathy!" I exploded so loudly that the printers, busily distributing type, craned their necks at me.

What Marcus might have answered to this, I do not know, for just then Taylor of the bank and Cohen the jeweller pushed through the door. Outside of their conventional business-suits, they wore full cartridge-belts from which dangled scabbarded 45-calibre revolvers. Drawing Marcus into the single unoccupied corner, they held a close, whispered conference. Glancing round the office, I felt—tension. The printers and Mannie Leaventrutt had stopped work, drawn together; with anxious, wondering eyes they were regarding that group in the corner. Our two little carriers, their sacks filled, sat with Johnnie the devil on a bundle of paper, shooting excited, boyish glances at the door, at me, at the boss.

So suddenly that we all jumped, Mike the bartender appeared in the doorway.

"The Marshal is back. And he's got," he announced.

"Any shooting?" asked Marcus anxiously.

"Not a chance. Boys dropped on him from behind."

"And——?" inquired Marcus. He glanced at the printers, and his lips appeared silently to form a name.

"He's with us," replied Mike.

Unaccountably, Taylor and Cohen broke into strained, hysterical laughter.

Marcus turned to the carriers.

"Get those papers out on the streets—rustle!" he said. "Let anybody out that wants to go!" he called to the guard at the door. And then to Mike:

"Cut the wolf loose!"

Mike disappeared. There was a moment of silent tension. Then from the street before our office sounded the note of a gong, beaten furiously. The distances gave back an echo of that metallic sound; all quarters of the horizon seemed to be

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imitating it, as though strong men were hammering every wash-boiler in camp, every dishpan, every implement capable of imitating a bell.

"Let's look it over—if we get separated, reassemble here in an hour," said Marcus. Taylor and Cohen swung their revolvers to handy positions before their hips and in nervous haste followed Marcus through the door, leaving me alone in the blackness of my own thoughts.

CHAPTER XVIII

I RIDE WITH THE CAVALRY

A SHUFFLE of many feet, which evolved from confusion to steady rhythm, sounded on the unpaved roadway without. The printers and even the press-boys were tearing off their aprons, scrambling into their coats, rushing through the doors. Numbly, almost indifferently, I rose and followed; and astonishment lifted me out of myself. Those knots of men whom, when I entered the office, I had marked loafing and whispering along the side-walk, had crystallized into military formation. Four abreast they stood; and constantly the column grew as more and more shadowy figures emerged from the moonlight, fell into line. While I watched, a file-closer near me took off his wide, black hat, tossed it away—pulled from under his coat the old, slouchy, long-peaked cap of the Civil War, put it on.

I walked round the column. Non-commissioned officers, busily arranging the ranks, shoving the men who carried rifles to the fore, imposing silence, stopped me again and again. Always the answer "Marcus Handy's assistant" gave me passage. A third of these men were wearing either that old Union cap, the black swashbuckling G. A. R. hat or the slouching wide-awake of the Confederate Army. And the reason for that quiet discipline of this mob-movement began to dawn on me. We were little more than a decade from Appomattox. Scarcely an American in camp beyond his twenties but had wallowed in the trenches of Vicksburg with Grant, dashed north to Gettysburg with Lee, marched through Georgia with Sherman, swept the Shenandoah with Sheridan, or raided Ohio

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with Morgan. Trained soldiers, they had fallen at command into the old habit of discipline.

A voice low but authoritative sounded from the entrance of the street, where dimly I saw the outline of a man on horseback.

"Right shoulder—*arms!*"

As the pieces slashed the moonlight, I could divide the veterans of the war from the young, undrilled recruits by the smart motion with which their guns came up to position. I perceived, too, that the rear ranks carried, instead of rifles, new hickory-wood pick-handles. But every man, whether equipped with gun or club, had a revolver belted outside of his coat.

The camp, before these shadowy instruments of vengeance and grim justice formed in the moonlight, had gone to bed. There was no music in the air, no distant clamour of crowds. Then out of that silence came a woman's scream, a distant, hoarse chorus of male voices. I could see a jerky reflex action in the ranks, heard one or two quick, profane expletives which were silenced, as abruptly as though a sound-proof curtain had been drawn, by the busy non-commissioned officers. A horseman, pulling up at the corner where our little highway joined Main Street, made a moving blotch in the night. The other horseman—who seemed to be in command—rode out from the shadows, took the head of the column. And his word of command came out clear and strong, for all Cottonwood to hear:

"Forward—guide left—march!" As he wheeled his horse, his face came out clear in the moonlight, and I recognized him. This was Brown the assayer. I remembered then that he had been a major of cavalry under Sheridan. Feet shuffled; a drum gave a short roll; then began the "Thump, thump, thump-thump-thump" of an army march-step. The column swung left into Main Street. I trailed along on the edges. Before Huffaker's hardware-store, Major Brown gave the command "Halt." Officers began splitting the column, dividing the riflemen from the pick-handle men. The riflemen, at com-

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mand, marched on. From the others, a squad fell out of line, broke in the door with half a dozen kicks. Lights came on within; a moment later, the squad emerged with its arms full of assorted rifles, distributing them along the ranks. I became aware, now, of the street. The side-walks were filling with half-dressed men and women. They spoke in whispers or not at all; and along the gutters walked guards with drawn revolvers, keeping line.

The distant, regular tramping of the riflemen stopped; then changed to irregular foot-beats. Evidently, the focus of interest lay in that direction. I hurried on. At the corner nearest the Pioneer Livery Stable, a guard stepped out, snapped his Sharp's rifle across his chest military-fashion, stopped me dead.

I accounted for myself and my business. "Get on quick!" he said as his gun-butt rang to the ground.

I was facing a glare. Lanterns, backed by reflectors and hung on to the seats or wheels of the wagons which always fringed the Pioneer corral, made a glaring blotch in the moonlight. There, as hazy with shadow yet as definite and characterized as though Rembrandt had painted it, stood the officials of the Vigilance Committee. Shorty squatted on the ground, his stocky figure hardly less tall than when erect. His face lay in the shadow of his broad hat, but his attitude implied alertness and command. He was pointing to a document. Above him leaned Cohen, his hands resting on his flexed knees, his derby hat pushed back. His frog-face had lost all its humour now; it had even become noble with the spiritual nobility of the Jew. Buck, Marcus Handy and Myers of the Variety Theatre stood in conference, central group of the composition. Buck, indeed, what with his majestic height, was the dominant figure. Strange contrast—I had last seen Buck and Myers together in the road to Ludlow's Pass, when Buck made his two captive dudes work at digging road. Now Buck had become the dude. He was wearing his new outfit of clothes; the coat, as was then the fashion, fastened by the top button and revealing a gorgeous waistcoat looped with a gold watch-chain. Myers, on the other hand, had dressed the

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part. He was wearing, jauntily and picturesquely, a blue shirt, a loose red tie, top-boots and very new overall breeches. Strung about them, I identified Siegel of the Beer-Hall, Taylor of the bank, Hutchins his teller, Lockhart superintendent of the Stonewall Jackson.

Round the pole corral, built heavily to resist the rushes of wild horses in process of breaking, ran a circle of riflemen, Hammers sounded; through the slash of light passed two men stringing barbed wire. At one side the remainder of the rifle company kept its column of fours; and as I watched, a squad on some special mission marched away at a quick-step.

Just as I stepped up beside the central group, Shorty and Cohen rose erect, staring. I followed their glance. A company of men was coming round the corner. Someone twisted the reflector behind a lantern. In the circle of light advanced Town Marshal McGrath, handcuffed, a guard holding his arms on either side. Shoulders square, head erect—he was a beautiful figure of defiance.

"Book him, Mr. Cohen," said Marcus in his most matter-of-fact, business-like tone.

"What charge?" asked Cohen, balancing a pencil above a black note-book.

"I don't know," replied Marcus. "I swear I don't, whether to put you down, McGrath, as an all-round crook or just a damn fool. Make it 'suspected person' for the present, Mr. Cohen."

But now the Marshal had found that splendid reigning voice of his.

"Damn you, Handy!" he cried. "This is how you're getting even. You ain't man enough to fight me. You can't fight except in your filthy newspaper——" he choked.

"My way of fighting," replied Marcus cheerfully. "I can't shoot for cold beans, Mr. ex-Marshal. And now I'm forced to give you some advice by way of saving your life, at least temporarily. This corral is the county jail of the new municipal government. These guards here are armed with rifles containing genu-ine lead bullets. Their instructions are to

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shoot anybody who approaches the fence. Chuck him in, boys!" McGrath and his guards became shadows in the darkness beyond the reflector-light; vanished through the latch-gate of the corral.

"May have to hang him anyhow, if he maintains that attitude," remarked Taylor *sotto voce*.

"Keep the rope dangling over him—he'll be a good boy before we're through," said Marcus Handy.

Another group had come into the light—Conway, guarded by three men. Deeper than ever over his gambler's face lay his mask of inscrutability. And gambler-fashion he bluffed, squaring his shoulders jauntily as he passed these his strange judges. But from stiff lips, which managed nevertheless to achieve a jocular tone, he inquired:

"When does the hangin' commence?"

"You'll have time to think over your sins!" replied Marcus. "Book him as accomplice of thieves and confidence men, Mr. Cohen," and, rattling off the words mechanically, he repeated the warnings and instructions he had given Chris McGrath.

Now the groups were arriving fast, two or three guards to each prisoner. From scattered spurts of conversation, heard then and afterward that night, I learned that the Vigilance Committee at the first call—issued by runners, within ten minutes after the bank-robbers went their way—had raised the curtain on a drama already rehearsed. A squad had dropped into the establishment of every person marked for arrest, loafed on thin excuses until the capture of Marshal McGrath. Then came the signal: beating on tin pans in lieu of a bell. Immediately, the committeemen had drawn, held up the place, secured their man—or woman. Not more than a hundred men had done the whole job; claim-owners of Hayden Hill, members of the "business element," including the squarer of the saloon-keepers, mine-owners and managers from Liverpool Hill, a few plain miners. Twenty of the most determined had attended to the Black Jack, centre of trouble. Si Conway and his working-force were no sooner removed than the committee closed the bar and games, counted and sealed the money

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on the tables, and opened a recruiting-office. Constantly, even at that moment, the squad thrown about the corral was growing as men emerged from the shadows of Main Street, gave some password, and fell in.

Next after Si Conway arrived three of his dealers. The first in line, whom I had last seen raking in winnings at the roulette wheel with an air of careless authority, walked on sagging knees as they say men go to the scaffold; his mouth was a slobbering chasm in a waxy face.

"What—are you goin' to do—with me?" he asked in jerks.

"As much as you damn well deserve, probably," replied Marcus. The sagging form of the dealer vanished; behind him his two companions, maintaining like Conway their gambler bluff, went the same way of mystery. Among the succeeding arrivals were both strangers and acquaintances—sharp-faced batteners on the wages of prostitutes whom I had seen loafing about the entrance to Pearl Street, that faro-dealer whom "Judge" Colliver the lawyer had got free of cold-blooded murder, and, behind a knot of shuffling men whom I recognized but dimly as faces seen in saloons and dives, Colliver himself. Evidently he had been dragged out of bed; for a red undershirt showed beneath his open overcoat, and his raven-black hair stood up like a mangy hairbrush.

"This illegal proceeding is an outrage, sir," he began. "In the name of the law you are violating——" A dozen angry voices broke in on this; presently Marcus dominated the clamour. "What you've needed for a hell of a time is a gag," he said. "You'll get it, too, if you don't shut up. Go on inside, and keep away from that fence or you'll die quick."

Round the corner sounded the high-pitched voice of a woman, pouring a steady flow of talk which quavered and shrilled with expletive. Into the light came Red Nell, keeper of the most expensive and notorious "house" in Cottonwood. She had added a shawl to her professional uniform—hair crimped into innumerable curls, pink blouse, short skirt, high-heeled red shoes. As she swung out both arms in a vain effort to rid herself of the guards, there was a flash of many diamonds; and

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the paint on her lips and cheeks, overlaying a face contorted with uncontrolled anger, gave the effect of some grotesque mask. She got one hand loose, and pointed.

"You!" she began, "You, Shorty Croly—you, Izzy Cohen, that has staid with me—you——" Her language exploded into filthy epithet. None answered. Even the ready Marcus seemed silenced. But suddenly the brutal and direct Shorty heaved forward his squat frame, laid hands on her, thrust her on. The epithets died in her throat, and her voice took on a tone of infinite and genuine reproach, as she threw over her shoulder:

"You didn't treat me this way last week, Shorty Croly, when you come——"

"Shut your filthy mouth!" barked Shorty.

"You didn't talk to me that way neither," put in Red Nell. "If you hang me, as there's a God in heaven, I'll——" but the rest was drowned in the clatter of the latch-gate.

Marcus turned to Taylor.

"That's all, isn't it?"

Taylor consulted the list in his hands.

"Yes, all checked up except——" He broke off there. And, just then, an armed guard in a Union cap emerged from the latch-gate into the light.

"That roulette-dealer of Si Conway's is beefin' for a preacher," he said.

The group by the wagon-wheels exploded into harsh, nervous laughter.

"How 'bout it?" inquired Marcus. "I had the houses of all the Holy Joes put under guard, so they wouldn't come and get sentimental over subsequent events and disturb the nerve of the boys."

"Let 'em stay under guard!" croaked Shorty.

"I dunno," mused Marcus. "'Twould kind of create the atmosphere we want in there, wouldn't it? What brand of preacher does the gentleman desire?"

"He's askin' for the Methody—this here Mr. Orcutt."

"What say, boys," inquired Marcus, addressing his fellows,

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"if we let Mr. Orcutt into the bull-pen on condition he don't interfere with municipal affairs?" Silence appeared to give consent. "Interesting to notice that this ravin', rampin', shootin', professional gambler is the first to lose his nerve," he added grimly.

And then, just as another squad of the armed forces detached itself, wheeled round the corner into Main Street, there approached the largest prison-gang of all—a dozen dishevelled men walking in a hollow square of the Vigilante "troops." These, by one or two recognized faces, I identified as the prisoners from the county jail. It had been cleared. Why? Taylor's remark, "all checked off except——" jumped into memory. In the front of my mind grew the picture of that face for which I had been searching subconsciously as squad after squad of prisoners entered the latch-gate. He had not been among them—the man whom I had shadowed to . . . Save for the criminals from the county jail and perhaps Chris McGrath, those prisoners in the stockade were probably held for the public safety, were merely in process of being frightened half to death that they might accept deportation quietly. The humorous hints of Marcus all pointed to that. But Marcus, talking to me in the office, had spoken bluntly of grimmer events to come.

The Central Committee squatted round the tailboard of a wagon, ghostly forms in the moonlight and the shadows. Save for inarticulate whisperings from this group and murmurs, terrifying in the implication of their sound, from the huddled prisoners within the corral, noisy, optimistic, Cottonwood now lay under the moonlight as silent as death. Occasionally, indeed, distant footfalls resounded from the board side-walks. They beat no longer with a cheerful staccato, but with the determined, concerted thump of marching troops. Yet everywhere in the moonlight stood the blotted, indistinct forms of men—waiting . . . the night seemed full of devils. . . .

The slight, nervous form of Mr. Orcutt, walking beside the guard, slashed into the lantern-light. The guard reported casually to the Central Committee, received a nod, vanished

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with the clergyman—and now out from the corral drifted his voice, resonant, rhythmic—praying. Into his prayer broke the hysterical squalling of Red Nell. . . .

I do not know by what curiosity of the human soul these sounds of comfort and despair tore away within me the last of those barriers which civilization, cultivation, education had built round the natural, primitive, killing savage. Something burst in my head; and I became at one with the best and worst of this orderly mob. They were going to kill—hideously, implacably. And I, whose wrong was most of all—I wanted to kill with them. At one moment, I seemed to myself an angel of justice, a rebirth of my Puritan forefathers who smote and spared not in the name of the Lord; at another, merely the cheated, tricked lover burning for revenge on him whose touch had polluted the unworthy beloved. Life and life's normal desires were over for me . . . if I died valiantly before another moon, better so . . . if only I got him. . . . I strode back and forth between the wagons; the one moving figure in that tense, static, moonlit landscape.

And then came opportunity.

The circle about the wagon had risen. I stepped up to Marcus. He was bending beside a lantern to consult his bull's-eye watch.

"An hour or so before daybreak," he said. "Better start the cavalry." A jerk of Taylor's head brought one of the guards to attention. There was a whispered order, a nod; and the guard vanished. Marcus stood a little aside from the rest. And so when I asked a question drawn from me by my emotions, none else heard.

"What's next?" I inquired.

Marcus hesitated, and then:

"Startin' the boys out for the main performers," he replied.

"The bandits?"

Marcus gave a slow, meaning nod.

"I want to go too," I said. My tongue filled a dry mouth. I heard my voice as though someone else were speaking, and it was thick.

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Marcus hesitated.

"Well, it will be the story of the day," he said, as though finding an excuse. Then, "Shorty!" he called. "I'm sending Gilson along—to report it, you know."

Shorty, inspecting his side-arm, arranging the cartridges in his belt, looked up.

"No you don't!" he growled.

I blazed. I found myself standing over Shorty, cursing him with round man-oaths, challenging him, if he had anything against me, to fight it out here and now.

Whatever doubt Shorty had of me this blast of genuine emotion seemed to dissipate. He ignored my insults and my challenge; only regarded me critically from the shade of his hat and then, addressing Marcus, responded:

"All right, old hoss! We'll take him along. But he's got to be a damn good boy!"

"Five minutes from now—alley behind the *Courier* building—keep your mouth shut if anybody asks you what you're doing. Here, Joe—give this man a long gun and a belt—get your horse, and rustle!" directed Marcus.

We sat, our horses in the shadows, waiting; so still that now and then a long breath, drawn involuntarily from the labouring lungs of excitement, would pull my spine up stiff as though I had heard a pistol-shot. The moonlight had begun to pale; and the inspiration of death that announces the dawn blew from the peaks. Must we wait there for ever?

The rattling lope of a horse sounded from the roadway beyond. The rider came into sight from the sickly shadows, pulled up, fell in beside Shorty at the head of the column. He was talking—in a low tone but steadily, emphatically.

I began to catch his words.

"I says to him, 'You can't bluff me,' I says. 'I know what you're doin',' I says. 'I'm just watchin' you,' I says. 'No, you don't dare put me off the force,' I says. 'I suspect too much——,'"

Emphatic, over-emphatic to the point of insincerity—whose

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voice was that? He pushed back his sombrero and the leaden light caught his face. It was Charlie Meek.

Into his monologue cut Shorty's sharp command:

"Forward—march!"

As we emerged from the alley, rode at a sharp trot eastward toward the moonlit pinnacles of the Pyrites, I saw that Charlie Meek still rode beside Shorty, leading the column.

CHAPTER XIX

AMBUSH

NOW, as early dawn and late moonlight began to blot out the blazing mountain stars, I looked up from my own sulphurous misery to perceive that the expedition had swung round the camp, turned the shoulder of Liverpool Hill, cut into the Forty-Rod road. From the single file which we had maintained on the trail, we fell without orders into double column, Shorty and Charlie Meek still leading, and, as the road began its sharp ascent, slackened our lope to a fast walk. A hell-bred inner energy was flowing over into my muscles, knotting my limbs or imparting violent jerks to my biceps and thighs. It was the physical urge for action rather than any conscious plan which made me force my way gradually forward. First, I took advantage of a stop to tighten cinches on the part of the rider just before me; then, when the posse broke into a lope on a level stretch and lost formation, I worked my fast and eager roan through the press like a jockey. When a sharp grade compelled us again to slacken our pace, I was just behind Shorty and Charlie Meek. Beside me rode a small, young man, in full cattleman regalia from boots to sombrero; on his saddle-horn was looped the riata of his trade. I recognized him as one of the cowboys whom I had seen driving the wild herds to the slaughter-house. Charlie Meek kept up a flow of muted conversation; mostly concerning what he always thought of Marshal McGrath and what he wanted to do with those bandits. I remembered the meeting I had seen last night by the jail-door, and wondered, and held my peace. Shorty answered in jerky monosyllables. Charlie, as though by shadow of his old authority, seemed to be in command.

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Out of the shades came that castle rock beside which I had met Constance Deane and kissed her—so long ago! Why, it was only a night since I had dwelt in a fool's paradise over her; tricked myself into believing in her! And I found myself praying that I might never see another night. But the relaxing memory of her kiss would creep into my meditations, so that I closed my eyes and relieved that moment. And then I remembered what I had caught her doing—riding from Forty-Rod Creek, to which we were now going for her lover or accomplice. Had I not recalled that, my next mood might have been pity for the suffering which she—whoever and whatever she was—must that day endure. But the thought of her coming tainted to my arms from her cherished rogue relit the flames of my torment. I dug my heels into the flanks of my horse, so that Shorty started, turned, and asked me gruffly who I thought I was bumping.

Now, dawn was grey over all the mountain slopes. Looking back as we topped a ridge, I could see that a faint, pink glow was beginning to rim the snows of the giant range behind us; and that Cottonwood Camp, a crazy pattern at the bottom of the vista, was streaming through the violet valley—mists trails of grey smoke from breakfast fires. Another ridge, and we broke into sight of Forty-Rod Creek—a cabin or so and a square-fronted store beside the road, a red dump or a grey roof peeping here and there from the dwarf trees, white patches of columbine fringing a shallow gulch. We dipped again into a hollow. There Shorty and Charlie Meek pulled up, Shorty raising his hand to halt the column.

"What's the idea now?" asked Shorty, almost deferentially.

"My notion that they'll make for the Ludlow Pass County," replied Charlie. "That's where they've held out before, according to police information. There's three trails cut out just below timberline, all toward Ludlow's. First breaks south about a mile above Forty-Rod. S'pose we look into them trails for tracks."

"Good idea, I guess," responded Shorty. "All right, boys?"

"Sure!" came from the nearer fringe of the posse.

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"Then s'pose we start," said Shorty. "Quiet now!" At a fast walk, we passed Forty-Rod. That camp of the false boom had collapsed; the cabins and store by the roadside had already the air of desertion; from only one stovepipe in the confusion of wildwood and prospect holes below was smoke arising. We were in a dip now; and now we were mounting between high yellow pines and red-tipped Alpine firs, last desperate spurt of vegetation before the blight of timberline. Dawn was very bright over the open mountain-sides; but a half-night still lingered here, so heavy were the shadows. I was riding just behind Shorty, to left of the double-filed column; I could see but dimly the saw-toothed, moustached profile of Charlie Meek. There was a nervousness, a special tension, in his attitude. He was talking again; but his voice jerked:

"Bad place here. Could shoot into us, and git clean away." I saw his hand go to his pistol-scabbard, and wondered why the cowboy, riding at my right, had urged his horse forward until its head overlapped Charlie's saddle.

"My God—what's that!" jerked out Charlie Meek, and then things happened so swiftly that only long afterward could my mind arrange them into the memory of an ordered event.

Charlie, drawing, had fired three times into the forest. The first two shots came close together, the third after an interval, like a single letter heard on a telegrapher's key. But hard on these two shots came two more, in the same rhythm; and though I was looking in the other direction, I knew that this time it was Shorty who fired. My own gun-shy roan danced and side-stepped. I sat and curbed him by instinct; for my eyes were on the cowboy. As with one motion, he had forced his horse up beside Charlie's, had vaulted from his saddle to the rump of Charlie's horse, had thrown the crook of his left arm about Charlie's neck, had with his right arm laid across Charlie's elbow a hook-like grip. Shorty leaped from his saddle, hung like a squat bulldog to the bit of the snorting, double-loaded horse.

"The gag—quick——" he cried. And as my own horse shied again into the shrubbery, horsemen and footmen crowded

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past me. I saw Charlie, with the cowboy still hanging like a barnacle to his back, tumble into the roadway; saw a confused struggle in the shadows by the ground. Then Charlie Meek was lifted to his feet. I dismounted now; drew near. His arms were trussed behind him; his light eyes stared with inexpressible terror from a grey face; his jaws were mumbling and slobbering over the wooden gag, as though he were trying frantically to speak. Shorty poked a gun into his ribs.

"Shut up," he said, "or you'll cash in premature. We've learned all we wanted to know about you. In case you're mixed up in your mind about these proceedings, let me inform you that the 'one-two, one' signal means 'scatter out and hide,' and was fired by somebody in the posse—meanin' you—after the last stage robbery. And 'one-two, one-two-three' means 'all clear, git to the claim.' It was fired similar after the hold-up of the Stonewall Jackson payroll. We were damn certain you was the party that fired it. Now we've got you, dead." The mechanical mouthing at the gag stopped; Charlie's jaws seemed to drop and set; he sagged down on to the shoulders of the men supporting him. "And you tried to hitch the blame on to that poor fool, Chris McGrath!" concluded Shorty. He turned to the posse, now grouped about him on foot. "Steady, boys, and keep your guns quiet. I'm goin' to repeat that signal just to make sure." He drew a second revolver; aiming at the bole of a tree, he fanned his hammer in five shots with that same rhythm—"pop-pop, pop-pop-pop!"

"Now," said Shorty as the reverberations died out, "leave your horses here. Hitch those that won't stand. You, Matt"—this to the cowboy—"you're guard to this prisoner. Bring him and his horse along. But keep to the rear so you won't show. If he tries any monkey-business, kill him. Don't anybody try to git ahead of me—I've looked over the land." His eye fell on me. "You leave your horse. And you keep entirely to the rear. You ain't in this." Something of Shorty's old suspicion seemed to sharpen his black eyes as he added: "Orders is to shoot anybody who tries to spoil this

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per-formance." The posse shifted six-shooters to workable positions, drew rifles from the scabbards of their saddles, hitched their mounts to bushes.

"Come on!" cracked Shorty's voice. He turned round the thick bole of a pine, ducked between two bushes. The posse followed in single file; I, as ordered, at the rear. Some twenty yards of tiptoeing through the sparse underbrush, and we had taken an abrupt turn to the right on a well-defined trail. Behind me I could hear the padding of the led horse. Once Charlie's voice mumbled through the gag, and the cowboy muttered: "Shut up!" I could imagine the swift motion toward his gun.

The trail came out into an open dip. Beyond rose a low, sharp ridge, bristling with dwarf firs which topped thick underbrush. Whispered orders passed down the line before the posse, crouching, crossed the dip, dropped, crawled to points of vantage in the bushes between the firs, lay with weapons at ready. The cowboy, after a moment's hesitation, led the horse bearing the bound captive to a clump of trees in the hollow at the centre of the clearing, stopped there. I was left alone, quite uncertain what my orders to stay in the rear meant—even if I expected to obey them. The fascination of that silent watch along the ridge, the urge for violent action, became irresistible. And none was watching me. Even the cowboy guarding Charlie Meek had his eyes on the focus of interest. Fully realizing that I was taking a chance with my life—and for the moment wholly indifferent—I dipped into the underbrush at the left of the clearing, worked as quietly as I could through it, came out at last into a trail, evidently an offshoot of the one down which we had marched. It ran in the general direction which I wanted to follow. Suddenly, I was aware that there was no longer a hill-side at my right, but the bright morning air. I dropped at the foot of a spruce which edged the trail, crouched among its low-lying branches. In the dim light, I reflected, I must be invisible. I looked about me.

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Below lay a bowl of the mountain-side, traversed by the head waters of Forty-Rod Creek. To my right curved that ridge—almost a cliff on this side—along which the posse had taken station. Aided just as I was by the obliterating shades of dawn, they were concealing themselves perfectly. Though I strained my eyes, I could catch sight neither of men nor of weapons.

At the bottom of the bowl stood a prospect hole with winch and bucket, beside a small dump of yellow earth and red rock. The clear waters of the tumbling stream divided it from a log-cabin. Instinct and the lay of the land told me that this was the centre of interest, the focus of those invisible eyes along the ridge. Glancing over what was so soon to be the field of action, I perceived that had I followed the trail ten yards farther, I should have stepped into the open and either betrayed whatever plan the Vigilance Committee had or forfeited my own life. Evidently, this trail led to the creek or the cabin.

So I lay and waited—five minutes perhaps, though it seemed hours. Nothing disturbed the quiet of that mountain dell but the lashing of the stream, the dawn-song of robins, the fluttering of camp-birds. The claim below lay deserted—or was it? My perceptions sharpened by all hateful emotions and now by suspense, I felt about it a sense of life, of interior movement. Somehow it seemed inhabited, packed, a-quiver with life. . . . I could have sworn that I even heard something stirring within it. . . . How much longer must I await the beginning of that action for which my hell-burned soul longed? My hand went instinctively to the revolver at my belt. Then I remembered—and, remembering, cursed myself for an inept fool—that I had left my rifle in its scabbard with my horse. No matter. If battle there was to be, I would charge in with my pistol or charge in naked-handed, so I got my man.

And then—a figure emerged slowly, cautiously, from the tangle of bushes beyond the dump. He stood a moment. Yes—there was life in the cabin. A hand, waving a white cloth,

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had been thrust from the window. The solitary figure stepped back into the bushes. A moment more, and four men emerged, walking in pairs, each pair carrying between it a box.

And then—far off to my right sounded a light shot as of a pistol, a heavier one as of a rifle—and there was a distant crashing of branches. I had jumped involuntarily at this sound; but my eyes never left the four men by the dump. I saw the leading pair straighten up, saw the nearest flash a hand toward his hip, saw the trailing pair drop the box, turn——

And the bowl below reverberated with explosion. From the cabin, from some place near the dump, from the wood-pile, streaks of red flame laced the dawn. One of the leading pair went down with the slow motion of a toppling building; he fell across the box as limply as a bag of old clothes. The other dropped his handle and spun half-way round before he pitched on to his face. Behind him, a man was flopping on the ground. A scattering burst of fire from the ridge to my right, where my fellows of the posse lay concealed, and he was still; I could even hear between reverberations the hollow sound of the bullets striking his flesh. . . . It was over, and I had not acted, only stood aside, an inert spectator. . . . Or was it over? Only three bodies lay down there by the stream. And the posse was charging. They came scrambling down the ridge, weapons at ready. Two or three stopped by the fallen men, turned them over. The rest crashed uphill through the bushes. One of the trailing pair must have acted more quickly than the other—leaped into the bushes at the sound of the first shot, got away. . . .

And still I crouched under the spruce-tree, shame and self-pity added to my inner hell. With all the rest, she had sapped my manhood from me . . . the moment of action had come and I had not even drawn my pistol to fire. . . . Others had taken my revenge. . . .

Footsteps—quick, stealthy—were coming along the trail to my left. As by reflex motion, I leaped suddenly through the branches; leaped face to face with—the man I had come for, the young, spruce man whom I had shadowed to my misery last night. It was still the dusky dawn there among the trees, but

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I knew him. His wide black hat shaded his face, but I knew him. Recognition and action came together in the instant while his hand was starting toward his hip.

Only, I acted not according to my plan, but on instinct. I never thought of my gun. I fought as I had been taught to fight—on the field at Harvard, in the rough, primitive football of those days. I dove at him in a high tackle, into which I put all my desires of violence engendered by that night. My embrace caught him about the arms, pinned them; my rush carried us to the ground with him underneath. He was smaller than I by thirty pounds; yet the moment I touched him, I had a sense that he was electric with nervous strength. An instant, so, we struggled in desperate silence. Then I felt him wilt in my grasp, go limp. I raised my head, looked into his face. He was my man—but I knew that already. His eyes had closed. I began to relax my hold, and his hand whipped like a striking snake at my belt. He had my gun—with the quickness of fear, of excitement, of hate, I got his wrist, threw my body across him to hold him down, twisted his hand backward until he dropped it. But he was struggling like a tied cat now, and what with the timberline altitude, the sleepless night, my hours of emotion, the false energy that had electrified my first attack was going fast. I managed, however, to grip his left hand as it began struggling toward his own belt; and so, with him spread-eagled under me, I put all the breath I had left into a yell for help. Welcome footsteps pattered from both directions. He quit struggling and:

“Murder! He’s killing me!” he cried.

“He lies—don’t let him get away—grab him!” I panted.

That member of the posse who came first up the trail I did not know, and to this day I have never identified him. But whoever he was, he had discretion and experience. He kicked away the fallen revolver, drew his weapon from its holster, stood covering us both. Gasping, as I gave ground, a demand that they secure my adversary also, I was hauled upright. A

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dizzy rush of blood blinded and deafened me for a moment. When my faculties cleared, I heard the voice of Shorty exploding in tones of admiration:

"Bully for you, kid! You sure got him!" I was aware that I stood supported on either side, that I was facing my captive.

The nostrils of his fine, firm nose were distending as he fought for breath, his complexion was changing momentarily from a flush of exertion to a pallor; yet his carriage was debonair, his green-grey eyes even challenging, insolent. Then he spoke; and though the breath puffed between words, his voice gave an effect of poise, of calm.

"What is this all about?" he asked. "Haven't you gentlemen made a mistake?"

There came a growl of indignant muttering from the posse. Shorty was first to find consecutive speech.

"Two damned bad mistakes," he said. "It was necessary to do a little shootin' just when you fellows come out in front of the cabin or we'd have got you all alive. And somebody missed you."

"You've captured the wrong man, gentlemen," replied my unknown enemy. "I was coming down the road when I heard the shooting, and——"

"You can tell all that to the judge!" snapped Shorty.

"Ah, these proceedings are legal, then!" exclaimed the stranger, with what appeared to be an air of genuine relief. "In that case——"

"Miner's law. Best law that is. But you'll git a trial," cut in Shorty; and the captive's eyelid flickered. "That will be all from you just now. Tie his arms, boys, and bring him along." Back toward the clearing we started, led by the group convoying the captive. He had an easy, athletic walk. Everything about him, in fact—the accent, the precise speech, the cool, formal manner—suggested the gentleman. Perhaps almost too much the gentleman.

We were well out in the clearing before I looked ahead; so much did this man whom I had captured for death hold

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my insane attention. Out of the woods came the cowboy, leading that little black horse on which the posse had mounted the gagged and helpless Charlie Meek. The saddle was empty. I saw then that a figure lay shrunk and huddled across our path. The leading group stopped beside it. The whole frame of the captive gave a jerk and then settled back, as by effort of the will, into a pose of easy nonchalance. I hurried forward.

Charlie Meek! He was bleeding from a hole in the chest; the side of his head was all asmeared with another wound. The gag still stretched his jaws; over it ran a bloody foam. But his wounded torso heaved; and there was a pleading intelligence in his eyes.

"Better git that thing out of his mouth," said Shorty with a touch of softness. "'Tain't needed no more."

Someone untied the gag. His eyes rolled until they showed only the whites; the muscles of his face drew; his jaws moved as though the last instinct in him, the talkative, was for speech.

Then his throat rattled and:

"He's gone!" said Shorty. I looked up at the captive. And other eyes, now that the curtain had fallen on Charlie's tragedy, followed mine. He was perhaps a trifle pale; but so, I suppose, were we all.

"Would one of you gentlemen mind slipping that rope a little farther up my right arm?" he asked. "It will hold me just as securely and won't chafe so much—thank you."

They led him on; seated him by the clump of trees. But Shorty, looking down at the body, vouchsafed unasked a word of explanation.

"Darn thoughtless of me," he said. "Ought to tied him to a tree up by the horses. Had some loony idea of keeping him where we could all watch him. When those road-agents come out by the cabin, the boys up there on the ridge showed a little excitement, I guess. Anyhow, Matt, that fool cowboy from the slaughter-house, lost his head and let go the bridle. And this"—Shorty dropped that contemptuous pronoun not

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untenderly—"took his chance and dug his heels into his horse. Matt got him here"—he pointed to Charlie's breast—"and—and somebody in the posse got him here. Then the boys down below had to shoot—— Hey! Here comes the Killer!"

Over the ridge marched another captive—tall, rangy, bearded. Vaguely I had been trying to account for the fifth bandit. This evidently was he. Led toward the clump of trees, he passed me. He had a pair of strange, staring, light-brown eyes, which seemed to look through and over the members of the posse, crowding round or following like little boys. Shorty ran forward, barking an order. Left alone, I followed. The tall man and my captive were facing each other; and their eyes showed no recognition; only faint curiosity. Then they were led away, made to sit down under separate trees. Shorty, all executive force again, sent one squad up for the horses, another down for the bodies.

A half-score of us, temporarily unoccupied, withdrew beyond earshot of the captives. Tongues began to wag. These men were in the state of excitement, of false exaltation, which momentarily follows tragedy. Some among them had fired the shots that killed. In after years, I suppose, memory of this morning up by Forty-Rod Creek was to disturb many a sleepless pillow with inner debate concerning right and wrong. But now—they discussed it as though they had been shooting deer, with many an argument over who really "got him." Then they questioned me about my feat; for I, who had gone on this hunt a suspected person, was now its hero. I had taken my man with my naked hands. I evaded answer. I did not want to talk, least of all about that; but my monosyllabic answers only gave me a false aura of modesty. Then the posse fell again into boasting and reminiscence; and to me, as reporter for the *Courier*, all addressed their narratives. Never did journalist hear any story less curiously, for my own moment of exultation in tragedy was passing. But I heard nevertheless, and absorbed half consciously the background to the night's events. I have heard it many times since from better authority,

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have put it together in logical detail. And because I have much more to tell, let me here finish with that.

Even before the robbery of the Cottonwood stage, the bank and the express company had taken serious thought concerning the raids on their treasure-shipments. From their own funds—for an appeal to the county authorities was worse than useless—they had employed Mike the bartender and two other detectives who never then or thereafter showed their hands or revealed their identities. The criminals and extortionists of our camp were all roughly interlocked; one group knew the gossip of the others. Moreover, they had grown careless with immunity. Every night, Mike the bartender plucked gems from drunken lips. Suspicion fastened on the five men who worked—occasionally—that remote, unpromising claim above Forty-Rod. The other two detectives watched this place until they pieced out the ways and habits of its occupants. Among other valuable details, they learned that a dish-towel, waved from a window as though in process of drying, was a signal for "all clear." One of them had followed the futile chases of Marshal McGrath after the latest stage robbery and the hold-up of the Stonewall Jackson payroll, and, matching notes with his fellow who watched the claim, had learned "someone's" code of signals by gunshot.

The place of Marshal McGrath in this criminal scheme of things long remained a matter of doubt. Finally the detectives and their employers rated him for what he was—an anachronism, a back number, representative of an era from which Cottonwood Camp had emerged. As Marcus said, he was just a "shooting fool," dowered with no useful qualities save courage and personality, unable to grasp any scheme of society except that era of gun-law in which he had been reared. And he would fight to the death to maintain what he deemed his right. Because he was a fool, he was all the more dangerous.

His hands were not entirely clean. Without sear of conscience, he took his tips and fees from the gamblers and the dives of Pearl Street. But he held no commerce, himself,

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with the footpads and road-agents. The liaison between these criminals and our police was some person lower down on the force. Instinct rather than evidence fastened suspicion on Charlie Meek.

"They say," remarked one of my gossips as he touched on this point, "that there were others in camp keeping 'em posted. Folks you wouldn't suspect. F'rinstance——" But here, by asking a trivial question, I cut him short.

Correction of these abuses by the orderly process of law and politics seemed hopeless. It would mean, literally, a fight—bloodshed. There was no certainty that the moral majority of our tolerant camp would side with our rough and ready reformers. Hence the Vigilance Committee, an idea born independently in the minds of both Marcus Handy and Taylor, the banker. Gradually they drew in the more zealous spirits, cautiously widened their membership, laid their plans. Always, these bandits of Forty-Rod were the main objective. Our most spectacular criminals, their punishment would furnish the most dramatic example.

Yet, weighing all the evidence, the working nucleus of the Vigilance Committee could not say absolutely that they had legal evidence against the "Forty-Rod gang." It was a moral certainty, nothing more.

Therefore, Marcus, who in point of imagination and initiative outran all the rest, conceived the plot whose tragic climax we were now enacting. He would tempt the bandits, lead them on to rob the Cottonwood Bank at such time and in such manner as best served to excite public indignation. Two days in advance of this false shipment, Taylor informed Charlie Meek concerning the time and manner of its delivery, asked officially for police protection.

Meantime, Mike had plucked another gem of information from the tipsy gossip of the Silver Dollar. The "Killer," that member of the gang who had wanted to torture the Stonewall Jackson paymaster, had grown dangerous. On any big job he was likely to shoot prematurely, recklessly. The rest of the bandits had quarrelled with him. What pressure they

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could put upon a wild man like him, unless it was knowledge of his manifold crimes, I know not. At any rate, they subdued him to their policy. The next time they went out, they would leave him behind to guard the cabin and watch the approaches.

On the night of action, a band of eight men, picked from the Vigilance Committee for nerve and marksmanship, hid in the bushes above the claim. After supper, they saw four of the inmates start through the moonlight to the little horse-corral on the hill-side above. A candle still burned in the cabin; by which they knew that things were going as expected. Two expert plainsmen stalked the claim—this, it seems to me yet, was the most valorous deed of that night. Luck served them; the Killer went out presently for a pail of water. When he returned, his right hand occupied, they rose up behind him, poked two muzzles into his ribs. Having satisfied themselves that he would not talk, the squad bound and gagged him and, disposing themselves in the cabin or the woodpile, waited for dawn. When the bank-robbers, having received the double signal for "all safe," should return to the cabin, the Vigilantes intended to let them enter, to get the drop, and to capture them alive.

Here came in the risky part of Marcus Handy's plot, the one weak link in the chain. If the bandits after the robbery found means to open those strong-boxes at once and discovered that they contained only the junk of our hell-box, they would take alarm. But the boxes, stout of fabric and of lock, would yield only to explosives. They had giant powder on their claim, and there, one or two blasts would attract no attention. Logically, naturally, they might be expected, on receiving assurance that the coast was clear, to forgather at the cabin. In all this, events vindicated the shrewdness of Marcus Handy.

Our posse served as a blind and a reserve. It was to ride past Forty-Rod, firing the reassuring signal, then double back and stand ready in case of unexpected trouble. Should the bandits fail to return, we were to wait a reasonable time and then begin a man-hunt.

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By prearrangement, Charlie Meek was not arrested with the Marshal. Marcus wanted to see what he would do. As Marcus expected, he turned on the Marshal, announced his own virtue, asked to lead the posse. Letting him fire the signal, thereby putting in our hands the last piece of convincing evidence, was an afterthought, a final detail arranged between Marcus and Shorty in the half-hour before the posse started.

So far, the elaborate program had gone through with machine-like smoothness—not a break or slip. I marvel yet that in taking possession of the town and arresting so many dangerous characters the Vigilantes never had to fire a shot. Then, at the climax, Charlie's escape gave the alarm. The squad concealed in the cabin and the woodpile acted as men of their place and time were schooled to act. Without a second's hesitation they cast the die and fired, almost in a volley.

"I missed the dude there," said one of the trackers. "He was right by the bushes, and as soon's he heard the shootin' up above, he vamoosed. I had him covered, too. Must 'a' ducked sideways just as I pulled. At that, I can't figure how he got away. We was all pepperin' the place where he must 'a' crawled to. Likely there's a rock in there."

"The dude?" I asked, genuine curiosity stirring for the first time.

"Him"—a jerk of the thumb toward my captive. "Rest is all checked up on, but nobody's got a line on him. Some tenderfoot crook, I guess."

The horses had come. Up from the hollow, men had borne the three corpses. All, by virtue of good marksmanship, had mercifully died in their tracks. They rolled Charlie's body over, roughly composed it, laid out the others beside it. The first was that man with a short black beard whom I had seen giving orders to my captive in the Black Jack the night before. Last night—every time my mind formed that phrase, I had a kind of vague wonder to think that years and ages had not passed since the setting of yesterday's sun. He had been

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struck squarely in the forehead by two heavy bullets at once, and mutilated most horribly. . . .

The posse was squabbling; apparently a dispute as to who should give up their horses to the captives and the dead. The bushes crashed again. Someone had found the five mounts of the bandits, was driving them in. There it was—the buckskin horse. Shorty detached himself from a knot of men, began examining that peculiar spot on his flank. Curiosity flickered through my black inertia. I joined him. Shorty looked up.

“Feel!” he said. “Didn’t get all the yellow whitewash off when they cleaned him up. Little scheme of theirs for an alibi. Ride a horse spotted conspicuous when you’re swellin’ round town, and paint him up when you go on a job. All the rest were decorated similar last night.”

I could have told him about one time when the bandits of Forty-Rod did not take all this trouble. Doubtless because they were working that day far from home, and trusted to the concealment of the bushes. And a thought which was also a perplexity tore the mists over my mind. Shorty had spoken of a trial. I had evidence, if evidence were needed, against my captive. I had seen that horse at the stage robbery. I had seen it again last night; and this man rode it. I had seen him taking orders from that piece of mutilated flesh, but an hour ago a man, lying on the ground there. I had followed him, seen him. . . .

And suddenly I realized that I would never stand up in court and testify to these things. I had gone out to kill him, man to man. I had captured him, probably to his death; but for me, he might have escaped. Probably my testimony would not be necessary; he was doomed already. But at any rate—I could not. And that thought brought to my consciousness a picture. From the witness-stand, I was looking across a miner’s court to the face of Constance Deane; a face set with hopeless misery save for two great blue eyes fixed upon me in unspeakable reproach. . . .

Shorty was bellowing orders—“Git those bodies onto horses! Tie up the prisoners and mount ’em! You, Matt, rustle back

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to camp and tell Mr. Handy we're comin'—ride! Don't anybody else go ahead—this job ain't over."

Glad for anything that would break my tumbling, fluttering thoughts, I hurried to my horse.

CHAPTER XX

BY THE JAIL-DOOR

THE sun had fully risen over the Pyrites, was dancing even on the westward slopes, when from a grove of dwarf pine our shoddily solemn procession emerged into the straggling litter of cabins bordering Cottonwood. Shorty, catching some of the dramatic impulse with which Marcus Handy had infused his plot, stopped us there and re-formed our ranks. The Killer, riding with a guard on either side, he put first; behind him, my captive; and next the four led horses bearing our kill. They lay across the saddles, lashed as men lash the carcasses of deer after the hunting, in the grotesque attitude of the newly dead. He who wore the short, black beard had bled a little after they bound him to the saddle, his upturned face staring at the morning skies as though astonished at what he saw; a reddish-black blotch stained the flank of his funereal steed. Charlie Meek had been tied on to the saddle face down; as he lay, head and arms hanging, he seemed in utter humility to be begging forgiveness of his sins against truth and faith. Behind rode the rest of us, two abreast. They who had been cavalrymen in the Civil War drew the rifles from their holsters, held them perpendicular, butt on thigh, as cavalrymen in that day were wont to do on parade. The rest, even I, made awkward imitation. Horsemen were swinging now round the line of shacks which marked the rear approaches of Main Street. As the leaders drew near, their attitudes expressed triumph, excited glee; when they saw what we were conveying, their motions slowed and softened as though a muting finger had been laid upon their nerves. Behind them ran pedestrians. They too underwent a

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transformation of voice and motion. And as we marched grimly, silently onward, bits of human observation snapped into my black, dead mood as fireflies pierce with their ineffectual fire a dark night.

A pedestrian had recognized Charlie Meek, was shaking his fist at the dead bandits . . . he would know better presently. . . . Before and behind, riders of the posse were slipping bits of news from the corners of their mouths to friends in our fringe of camp-followers . . . my own name. . . . Men were pointing me out. . . . "And never even went to his gun," I heard. . . . My captive ahead rode with his back straight, his head up . . . if he would only sag or droop . . . his spirit defied mine. . . . This was Main Street. How the Vigilance Committee had grown! A cordon of armed guards stretched on both sides of the way. . . . A woman looked from a cabin-door, raised a hand to a pale forehead, crossed herself. . . . I must not look at the crowds again. . . . I might see—what matter if I did see . . . ?

"Forward—guide right!" barked Shorty from the head of the file. The command was unnecessary; we were already riding forward. But all along the line, eyes which had been wandering leaped to attention and turning heads came straight. We filed down Main Street. A murmur, a babble, hailed the head of the column; then the sight of the corpses muted that, as a closing door mutes a noise without. We had reached the toy court-house. In front of it lay the one clear space of side-walk; for its approaches were double-guarded. There was the jail; by its door waited a group of men. Even before I could identify form, motion, feature, I knew that this was the Central Committee. But we halted a moment at Dr. Evans's undertaking-parlours and dropped out of line the horses carrying the dead. There, behind the show-windows, they were to lie in dishonoured state. "Forward—march!" barked Shorty again. At the jail we made our final halt; the posse spread out fanwise to hold back a rush of the awed but curious crowd. A waiter from Huffaker's filed along the line, passing up hot coffee and sandwiches. I tried to drink a cup

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of coffee, and choked. I rode forward to the jail-door, dismounted, watched the prisoners as a dozen hands dragged them from their saddles, thrust them within. Through all this indignity, both in their various ways kept their dignity. The Killer's light, filmy eye looked through his jailers as though they were shades. My captive, my enemy, my destroyer—he smiled; though I saw that it was but a muscular effort, cramped by sheer will on to that loose mouth of his. Me, his captor, standing there watching him with all my eyes, he did not appear to see at all. But his stand when he reached ground was firm; and he spoke in his balanced, cultivated tone:

“Will you kindly send me my lawyer?”

“You'll find him in court!” someone answered shortly. His back still straight, he was shoved inside. The door slammed.

Men crowding about me . . . congratulations on my nerve . . . Marcus repeating: “It's great, boy!” . . . Buck reassuring me that he always said I ought to have been in the game from the first . . . others . . . the touch of their hands was loathsome . . . would they ever let me alone? . . . Ah, now the committee had gone into conference . . . flashes of light on their intentions. . . . The prisoners were to be tried separately, the Killer first. . . . “He won't take long,” I heard from Shorty. . . . Major Brown was to be judge. . . .

“Well, come on! Let's get it over with!” Marcus commanded. Then his sharp, strained countenance turned my way and he seemed again aware of me.

“Coming along to the proceedings, boy?” And that inquiry jerked me out of the haze into the light. I would not, I could not attend that trial because of what I knew and would not tell, but mostly because that softening picture rose again—the blue eyes of Constance Deane. Guilty she might be—guilty of course she was; nevertheless, I could not face their reproach. And Marcus, peering into my face, must have guessed something of this; for his expression softened and:

“All right!” he said. Then, as though finding for me a logical way out, he added:

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"S'pose you stay here on guard." Others were listening now; and for their benefit he went on with a jocularly I knew to be assumed: "You brought him in, and you keep him. Hey, McNeill, Bowles! You're to stay here on guard. The three of you ought to be enough for one man. Mr. Gilson's in command." The door had opened again. The Killer emerged between two guards, his hands now unbound. There was a welt above his wrist where the rope had cut. . . . But he walked straight.

Someone had given me the key, someone had commanded that I was to open the door only on signed order or personal demand of the Central Committee. Down the street walked the captive and his guards. The crowds, the very forces of the Vigilance Committee, seemed to dispel, shift, regather like black storm-clouds driven by the wind. All moved forward, swarmed about the court-house. The mounted posse, its task done, formed and rode away to the Pioneer Corral, there to unsaddle and feed their horses. My own roan, standing with reins tossed over his head by the jail-door, lifted his muzzle and whinnied after them a gentle hint. But with some vague idea that he might be needed, I let him stand.

McNeill, as proved by his military cap, was a veteran of the Union armies. As though automatically, he shouldered arms, marched back and forth with all the smartness of a sentry. Bowles fell into the motion. I, after standing for a time by the door and finding the jerk of my muscles going again beyond control, yielded to the urge for action and imitated them. March, wheel—march, wheel—every turn carried me past the window of the jail. I would not look! But I kept that resolution for only three turns. He was sitting on a bench by the stove, idly shuffling and reshuffling a dirty pack of cards. I snapped back to my resolution—I would not look. But every time I passed that window, the muscles of my neck quivered. Five minutes more, and again the impulse mastered my will. He was walking up and down the jail now; but his pace seemed unhurried, his knees firm. Five minutes more, and his voice spoke in my ear, bringing me up with a jerk:

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"Any news from the stranger your friends put in here with me?" he asked.

I was looking into his eyes.

"Oh! You're the fellow who made the mistake about me!" he said.

He was smiling still; it seemed, however, not so much forced now as set. Why did I find it hard to meet his eyes? Why did my soul within me shrink, as though I were the criminal and he the avenger?

"I am not allowed to speak to you. Get away from the window!" I ordered.

"Since you ask so nicely!" he replied, and returned to the bench.

Half an hour more; a half-hour of such inner agonies, such hell-ridden thoughts, as I have no strength to record of myself even after all these years. I have said that the night before, as I sat on the dump of Liverpool Hill, it seemed that God had scattered, shuffled all my faculties and rearranged them into a different Robert Gilson. And now God was struggling to make me back into the Robert Gilson I had always been before that night of jealous follies. And I was fighting it; fighting as a wilful little boy fights, with the one thought that I must not weaken. . . .

The bee-like swarm about the court-house became active, moved, shifted. Heretofore it had been silent or nearly so; merely buzzing with subdued conversation. Now, its members broke into audible speech, even into vociferation. A large squad of Vigilante guards had detached itself, marched away; it disappeared into that alley which led to the Pioneer Corral. Ten minutes later, it emerged—augmented. Between the ranks, I discerned the tall form of Chris McGrath, framed by an unranked crowd. Ah, there were the prisoners of the Pioneer Corral, they who were held for deportation. There was Colliver; there was Red Nell. The squad alined itself and its captives before the log assay office beside the court-

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house. From the peak of its gable extended a new timber. It had not been there before. . . .

McNeill and Bowles paused in their mechanical walk; slow step by slow step they drew, fascinated, nearer to the outskirts of the crowd. I had no thought nor heart to command them to stay. Indeed, I was aware only with my subconscious self that they had moved at all. I stood between the door of the jail and the window, my back against the logs, and looked. Looked with all my eyes of body and soul.

A horse was being led into the crowd—a bare-backed bay horse. The guards were beating men away from him; and the babble had stopped. The only sound was the shuffle or thump of feet on the board side-walks. Men had come through the court-house door. Above them emerged a form, bare-headed, blindfolded, hatless—they were lifting him on to the horse. They were leading the horse toward the beam. The Killer's head was wagging as though he was talking. There seemed no benefit of clergy—and Marcus had summoned a clergyman for the gambler who lost his nerve. I knew then that his speech was but blasphemy; that the Killer, on whose departing soul lay the blood of twenty men, was dying as he had lived. There was a man on the beam . . . tying a rope. . . . Someone standing on a chair had dropped the loop over the Killer's neck. His head wagged; was still. The horse gave a violent leap out from under him. . . . A murmur that was a wail from the crowd . . . A man on the outskirts pitched over on to his face . . . The heaving shoulders, the blinded head, visible above the spectators, were spinning. . . .

And a voice wailed and choked in my ear:

"Oh, God—oh, God!"

The prisoner stood at the window. His hands clutched the bars. His eyes stared. His loose mouth had fallen open. His head was wobbling on his shoulders. And his despairing glance clutched at mine.

"Let me go!" he pleaded. "Let me go!" I shook my head.

"Then send for my wife"—the words came out of him in

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spurts, in jerks. "She'll—she—might get me out of this. For God's sake, send for my wife!"

"Who is your wife?" It was as though someone else spoke.

"Mrs. Deane—Mrs. Constance Deane—Mrs. Barnaby's place"—he was sagging from the bars now. "She came to get me out of this. All the way to make me stop this. My God, if I'd listened to her, I'd have been a decent man——" and then, as though the sense back of his emotion warned him that he was making a fatal admission, his mouth snapped shut, something like intelligence returned to his eyes, and he finished weakly: "Send for my wife."

Mechanically I repeated, I do not know why:

"Get back from the window!" For I was Robert Gilson again; like a naked soul at the judgment-seat, I saw what insane jealousy had made of me, what I had done to the woman I loved, what a thing I had been. . . .

And I turned, as though the motion would relieve me of my thoughts, and saw her; and thought for an instant I was seeing a vision. She stood at the jail-door. One hand rested on the latch. The other clasped round her head a black shawl. Her blue eyes, swimming in anxiety which I took for reproach, seized mine, clutched them.

"You!" she said. "You!"

"Is this your husband?" I asked.

"Yes. Quick! Have you the key?"

"Yes."

"Then give it to me!" Her hand, her eyes, pleaded. "You say you love me——"

"No," I said, "I will do it myself." And while I was saying that—so quick is thought—I had formed both a determination and a plan. All save us stood watching that drama of a passing soul, their eyes captives of horror. My fellow guards were not watching. My roan, with his trick of speed, stood at the door. I moved forward to act. She raised her hand as though to protest, dropped it as though realizing that she would waste time. I threw the reins over my saddle-horn, I turned the key in the lock. It grated. I glanced involuntarily

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over my shoulder. McNeill and Bowles had not heard the sound. My captive was crouched on the floor, half collapsed. As I entered, his eyes went wild.

"Listen," I said, "and get yourself together if you want to live! There's a horse at the door. Here is my hat. It's a different colour from yours. Follow me out. Get on to the horse as quietly and quickly as you can——"

Instantly control came to his face, his limbs. But I staggered the six steps to the door.

"Wait a moment!" I said. I placed myself by the saddle, on the side toward the crowd. A tiny practical consideration troubled my mind for an instant, and was as instantly dispelled. I was tall, he short—but I rode still with the short Eastern leather—he could reach my stirrups. He mounted so suddenly that his foot, crossing the saddle, struck my back. The beat of a trot, a lope—he was gone. . . . I looked back toward the crowd. McNeill had turned his head . . . but this phenomenon of a galloping horse appeared neither to warn nor to interest him. His gaze turned back toward that suspended torso, again moving and swaying, toward those bound, convulsed arms. No one else had seen.

I was facing Constance now. "Oh, you must go too!" she cried.

"And you?" said I.

"I am responsible for this—I will face the responsibility!" she said simply. And her eyes were superb.

"No, I am responsible," I said. "It was I who caught him."

"You?" she faltered. "How—why?"

"I captured this man single-handed because I saw him talking to you last night. Because I was jealous. Because I went mad and thought unspeakable things of you. Because——" And I stopped there, on the verge of wild self-accusation.

"Ah, I should have told you!" she said. "If I only had! I temporized. I could not bear——" Not a word of reproach!

"Because you loved me?" I asked.

"I had no right to love you. I was tied—— I came here

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because—because it is my job—to save him from himself—but go! I beg you, go! I have acted on impulse. I have saved him to put you in danger. I would rather——” and she stopped.

“No,” I said. “I have been wicked enough. It is you who must go. I will face it.”

“And I will not go!” she replied simply, firmly. I saw I could never move her.

“Then we will both stay.”

Looking into my eyes, she must have read a determination equal to her own. Her look lightened a little. “Perhaps I can find a way out,” she said.

For her, I knew there was a way out. They were not hanging women. Marcus had elected only to deport Red Nell, and had withheld even that punishment from Constance herself, suspect though he held her. For me—the Vigilance Committee had only one punishment for such as me. It was immunity or death. I looked at the swaying thing before the door of the assay office, and for a moment pure terror loosened the joints of my knees. But for Constance beside me, I should have run away. I gripped myself finally. And for a long time we did not speak. Then her hand went out, touched my arm, crept downward, took my hand. And so we stood and waited. I grew stronger to face death.

The Killer was gone at last. He had been a long time dying. Someone, probably one of the doctors, had announced this, I felt. For the crowd buzzed again in talk. Now the guards were carving a way between the court-room and the jail; and I filled my lungs and squared my shoulders for my ordeal. If I died—I must carry one thing across with me. And as a slow-moving body of men emerged from the courthouse, moved between the lines, I spoke it like a last request.

“Constance, you love me, don’t you?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said simply, and pressed my hand before she released her hold. “But I have tried to do my duty. And how I have blundered——” Her voice, her delicious voice,

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broke here. But she controlled herself, and smiled reassurance into my eyes. So we stood until the Central Committee reached us, and Shorty, marching with two guards, said:

"Give me the key!" And as he said this, he cast at Constance a frown of surprise and disapproval.

I had been forming my plan. I had not dared confide it to Constance. It would give the refugee more time—all or nothing for me now! I saw that Taylor was not with the Central Committee. And, swallowing my sickening fears, I lied.

"The key?" I said, affecting surprise as well as I could. "Why, the door's unlocked. No one's in there. Mr. Taylor came and took him away—with a guard!"

"Sounds to me like a damn lie!" said Shorty, his eyes travelling from me to Constance. "What——" but Marcus cut him off.

"Taylor was in the court-room last time I saw him. One of you guards—you, Robertson—go look for him." The face of Marcus seemed ten years older. His bright eye had gone dim; the dark bristles of his unshaven cheeks emphasized the waxy yellow of his complexion. And through my anxiety, my mounting terror, my battle for resolution, I spared energy for regret that I was deceiving him, my friend, my chief, my partner. Buck too. . . .

The rest drew aside, talking in low tones, regarding me narrowly, inimically. Constance stood with her back to the log wall of the jail. She had dropped her shawl to her shoulders, revealing the autumnal glory of her hair. None looked at her; but all seemed sensible of her presence. And she did not speak; but I knew that she understood my manoeuvre, and that those long, sighing breaths meant fear.

Between the file of guards Taylor came running. The crowd, sensing some hitch in the proceedings, was pushing toward the jail. The guards were forcing them back. Taylor had reached our group.

"What's this?" he panted. "What's this about taking away the prisoner? I haven't seen him!"

The voice of Constance, rich, level, even:

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"No, gentlemen. I let him go."

"That isn't so!" I cried. "I had the key. I unlocked the door and released him."

A confusion of voices. Men jostling and pushing all about me. Shorty's face shoved close to mine; Shorty asking:

"Which way did he go?"

"I'll never tell!" I replied.

More confusion. Someone had struck me on the side of the head. They were forcing back my struggling arms, tying my hands. Someone yelling that my horse was gone. Shorty ordering the cavalry to saddle and start. A voice crying: "String him up!" Constance speaking, her tones cutting sharply through the babble: "Don't—oh, don't! I did it, I tell you! I did it!" My own voice gasping: "Steady! It will be all right!" Marcus and Buck by very authority clearing a space about me. Marcus crying: "No lynching without a trial in this camp!" Constance, her voice controlled now, saying: "It is not necessary to touch me, gentlemen. I will go with you." A hollow square of guards forcing us on; I, remembering how the Killer walked to his death, trying to hold my head as high, to move my legs as firmly.

Through an agitated, hysterical crowd, we popped into the door of the court-house.

CHAPTER XXI

JUSTICE, LAUGHTER AND MERCY

IN my picture of life, Major Brown had been another dim, suggested bit of background. I knew him as our most reliable assayer, as the first locator in the rush to Hayden Hill, as a substantial personage about camp; I had marked casually his military carriage, the grizzled moustache close-clipped over a cliff-like upper lip, the cold command in his blue eye. The Vigilance Committee, I have learned since, elected him presiding judge through complex motives. They wanted for the moment no traffic with lawyers. Judge Cowan and "Judge" Colliver had brought that profession into disrepute. Moreover, the proceeding was so illegal—technically—that no decent member of the bar could possibly give it approval. Brown, not a lawyer, had nevertheless served as judge-advocate to his regiment in the army of the Potomac; and, as commander of the Vigilante "troops," he had prestige to strengthen his presidency of what might be an unruly court.

As they unbound me and led me up to the table at which he sat in judgment, I studied his face. I saw determination there, but no mercy. And my soul within cried out for mercy rather than for such justice as this court was administering. For as I entered the door, I had glanced upward involuntarily; seen, close by, the swinging body of the Killer. The bandana handkerchief had slipped down, revealing the distorted, blackened horror of his face. Never was my will so tested as in that moment. I tried to glance at it casually, as casually to glance away. But my knees wobbled, my tongue went dry,

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and I must have done a poor piece of acting. My spirit had descended to its lowest ebb. I invented and rejected elaborate lies. For one terrible, degraded moment I entertained in my terror the idea of blaming the woman for my incredible follies; of laying it on my accomplice as do vulgar criminals. With the last remnant of strength in my soul, I downed that.

About me stood ranged the Central Committee, Buck and Marcus nearest. They, my best friends in camp, my partners, averted their faces. As with conscious effort to control my voice I gave my name, age, residence, I looked round the room hoping vaguely and vainly for the comfort of some friendly eye. There was none. The benches had been removed; Vigilantes, armed, alert and silent, stood wedged to the very door. Outside were more armed men holding back the expectant populace of Cottonwood.

They had seated Constance in a chair beside the judge's table—odd that I had not looked for her before! That hysterical moment of hers when they laid hands on me by the jail-door had changed to a great stillness. I never saw a face and form of the living so quiet and so beautiful. Her shawl had fallen to her shoulders in a cowl; it framed and emphasized the glory of her hair, the warm yet colourless white of her skin. Her hands lay clasped in her lap, but loosely; they did not clutch or move. I had that morning imagined her eyes looking at me across a court-room with unutterable reproach. They looked on me, indeed; but with no more emotion than is in the blue petal of a flower. Above all, they were not afraid. My little terrors of the flesh vanished.

"Shall we try these prisoners one at a time—the man first?" asked Major Brown. This was a miner's court, and democratic in its forms, I perceived. The judge merely presided.

Constance stirred and spoke. At the Major's words, a buzz of debate had started in the rear of the room. But her rich voice with the dropping syllables muted that:

"I presume you are trying this man for letting your prisoner escape? Then I should remain to testify. Because I am wholly responsible."

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"That is not true," I said, as firmly as I could. "I did it alone. This lady is trying to save me. I let him go. Because——" There I stopped. How could I, without betraying her, shaming and humiliating her, say why I did it? What excuse could I possibly invent? I clutched at a weak one. "Because I didn't want to see him hanged. I brought him in," I added. "I caught him. And I had a right to let him go."

Major Brown struck the table with his gavel.

"Prisoner, you are getting ahead of the proceedings," he said. "Gentlemen, under the circumstances hadn't we better let this lady stay?" There was silence. He paused a moment. "Very well, if no one objects. Clerk, book the lady." He did not look at Constance, and neither did the clerk, as she answered to the formal inquiries:

"Constance Deane—Mrs. Martin Rossiter Deane—of Providence, Rhode Island."

His name! I had never heard it before. Odd that I should hear it first in such circumstances! Everything was odd; even comically odd. Never have I been able to reconstruct in memory the events of the next few minutes. I had not slept for twenty-four excited hours; I had reached to a thousand emotions; I had struggled with my captive to the limit of physical endurance; I had drunk horror until my soul voided it. And in that supreme moment when my life was being weighed in the balance, I passed into a light-headed mood where nothing recorded itself clearly in my mind, and nothing mattered. I was to have an attorney—Marcus. Shorty objecting. But Marcus was talking for me. Of course, that was why he had averted his eyes! He didn't want to seem over-intimate. Good old Marcus! Major Brown was wearing a yellow cravat, horribly creased from much tying. An abominable colour. He should get a new one. There was one of Judge Cowan's law-books on the table. Covered with paper. Curious that an untidy man like Judge Cowan should take such care of his books. One of the mounted posse testifying. He said that Martin Deane—that

JUSTICE, LAUGHTER AND MERCY was his name, Martin Rossiter Deane—had cried: "He's killing me!" That wasn't what he said. It wasn't true. How much of the truth should I tell? Shorty talking. Saying there was something peculiar in the whole business up by Forty-Rod. Protesting voices—yes, they were members of the posse. They knew I caught him fairly, naked-handed. A blow-fly buzzing round the head of the clerk. The clerk slapping without looking up. They were handing me a book. I was being sworn. Constance Deane sitting so quiet! I had kissed her once. Should I ask to kiss her again—before——? Why, she looked like a slender-girl edition of that handsome matron who from the library at Cohasset had sent me West! Like my mother in her portrait as a bride. The one in the dining-room. I had never thought of that before. I hadn't written to Mother for a week. Would they let me write if——

I was talking I must remember not to say that I gave him my hat and my horse. They might identify him by my hat and my horse. Shorty—he seemed to be prosecutor—was asking me about that. I must dodge, dodge. I was saying that it was some horse which stood by the jail. And saying it badly. They would never believe me. Marcus was talking. About my previous reputation. A strange court! They let advocates testify. Buck was talking. About my squareness. And:

"We will hear now—from the lady!" said Major Brown. I came conscious, wide awake, every sense preternaturally acute. A drawing of many breaths agitated the room; then, as Constance rose, absolute silence even outside. She stood, hands folded before her, facing not the judge but the crowd—a woman alone with a hundred men who had that day killed. Her lips parted once or twice; then she was speaking in that low, lovely voice with its dripping pause between syllables—and fluently.

"In the first place, gentlemen, the man who escaped a few minutes ago was my husband—Martin R. Deane. I married him in Providence five years ago."

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A shuffle of feet changing position; a composite suspiration of breath like one long sigh.

"I think you will allow that a wife in any circumstances should do what she can to save her husband's life. Of course, you intended to kill him. I did not know until this morning what happened in town last night. Then I learned—I suspected—that you had my husband in jail. I reached the jail while—while you were—killing—the other man. I felt my husband had no chance. I saw an opportunity. And I released him." She had been speaking calmly, evenly; but her voice reverberated with a break of emotion as she added:

"Would any one of you gentlemen expect a wife to do anything else? Your own wife?"

Major Brown sat with his eyes on the cover of Judge Cowan's law-book. Without looking up, he asked:

"Mrs. Deane, will you explain how you accomplished this? The jail was guarded, and Gilson had the keys."

My life, I felt, hung on her answer. Yet I did not want her to lie. And what effective falsehood, indeed, could she invent? I searched the smooth pallor of her face. It gave no hint of her intention. Then:

"Gentlemen, I forced this man to do it—Mr. Gilson." That was fatal! Yet I was glad.

"How?"

"How does a woman make a man do anything? He was alone in front of the jail. The other guards were watching—what you were doing." Here she paused and drew a breath so deep, held it so long, that I thought she would never release it. Then, as though realizing that she must shrink from nothing, she went on: "The hanging, I mean. Mr. Gilson had captured my husband. He didn't know it was my husband. I told him. He is my friend. He did not want to break my heart. I begged him. I entreated him. I made him feel that if you—hanged—my husband, it would kill me. He unlocked the door. My husband got on Mr. Gilson's horse. He has told you differently. But if you believe him, you must believe that he was at least an accomplice in stealing a horse." How

JUSTICE, LAUGHTER AND MERCY quick was her intelligence! I hadn't thought of that! "When he says it was some unknown horse, he is only trying to make my husband's escape more certain—trying to save me and mine. I cannot let him do that. He has done enough. He took his life in his hands like the gallant gentleman he is. But I made him do it. If I had asked——" She stopped there. What she had intended to say, what she had cut off with a little intake of her breath, I could supply. So, I think, could the rest. It was a boast of the power in her sex. "If I had asked any one of you—I with these eyes, I with this appeal of my youth and womanhood and goodness and grief—what would you have done?" Any man in the room must have read that in her silence.

Major Brown cut in with his dry, unemotional tone:

"Mrs. Deane, how much have you had to do with your husband's operations in this camp?"

For the first time, her smooth pallor broke into colour. As from a sudden, intense flame, a spot burned instantly on either cheek, was instantly gone.

"Does this court require a wife to testify against her husband?" she asked.

"No."

"It happens I would have nothing to testify as to that—nothing that would be useful to you. I came here looking for my husband. I knew he must be here. I did not find him until two weeks ago. I met him, riding. I tried to persuade him to come home with me to the East. I went again one afternoon to his cabin."

"His cabin—where?"

Dangerous ground, I felt! Did she know that Martin Deane, on being captured, had denied residence at the claim above Forty-Rod? How could she know? But instinct seemed to warn her away from that.

"Where he lived is no matter. I saw him again last night. He came to my tent"—a stir in the back of the room. Somewhere there, I knew, were the men who had watched. "He was not sober. He promised me that he would go straight to

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his cabin. And that to-morrow he would start home with me. Back East." She paused. Major Brown cleared his throat, as though hesitantly preparing to put again his embarrassing question. She anticipated him:

"Allowing that my husband's business here was criminal—which I do not allow—I had nothing whatever to do with that. I have not communicated with him in any way—except as I have told you. When we talked, it was only about coming home with me. I cannot prove this, of course. But you cannot prove the contrary." Again her cheeks grew vivid, melted to pallor. "Gentlemen, I acted this morning on impulse; but if you hang anyone, you should hang me. I did not see the end of what I was doing. I did not know that I was putting in danger a fine, brave, good man, worth ten times——" Her voice broke a little here, but she caught back her sob. "And if you hang him, you *must* hang me. I do not care to live and realize what I have done. That is all." Firmly, Constance sat down.

Major Brown looked about the room. My eyes, following his, searched all faces of my jury for a sign. Signs indeed there were, but contradictory. Part looked at Constance and smiled. Part kept their eyes sullenly on the floor as though afraid to meet her gaze. Those were the implacables. The gavel sounded behind me. I started and turned. Major Brown lifted his face to the crowd, opened his mouth to speak. But Buck, shoving past Marcus, stood before the table.

"Gentlemen," he said without the formality of addressing the court, "before we do any votin' I've got a few brief remarks to make concerning where we are at. This Vigilance Committee wasn't formed just to give the boys a treat. We was after somethin'. We wanted to make this here a decent camp. And we took the only way there was. Some day, I suppose, this here imperial State is goin' to come snoopin' round inquiren' into these proceedings. What'll they find? That we cashed in five tarantulas that was better dead anyhow. No kick. Everybody satisfied. We've had that bunch looked up. Goin' on any law that ever was, they all would 'a' got a

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long term, an' most of 'em the rope. We've saved the State a heap of board. But you've struck a different question with the kid here. He's—he's good. He's helped make this here camp. He was in on the carbonate discovery. He's been workin' on the paper fightin' the bunch of crooks that was runnin' us. He's got nerve. I know. It's all right to go up against a man with a gun in your hand. But I don't see myself tackling a bandit bare-handed like he done. I dunno why he turned this here Deane, alias Maxwell, loose. Maybe I'm guessin', as maybe you all are, but I don't know. Anyhow, if he did it, I'm bankin' he had a good reason, a damn——" Buck checked himself here, vainly tried to bite off the profane word he had dropped in the presence of a lady.

"This Vigilance Committee has done what it started out to do. Nothin' more but get the resignations of Judge Cowan and the rest of that crowd at Grizzly. Bunch of the boys rode over last night for that. They haven't been heard from yet, but I guess they got it. To-night, after this here town catches in with its sleep, we're goin' to form the new municipal government, and call a special county election. After seven o'clock, there won't be any Vigilance Committee. S'pose we hang this boy? He's done nothin' that a lawyer would call illegal. There'll be hell to pay, that's all." Buck paused, looked round the room. No one answered him at first. Then Shorty gave a growl, preliminary to speech.

"Shut up, Shorty!" snapped Buck. If anyone wanted to know why it was called Hayden Hill, not Croly's Hill, the answer was here. For Shorty did shut up; and Buck continued:

"I ain't goin' to let it happen. Not if I can stop it. The Vigilance Committee has worked harmonious so far. If you go on with these proceedings, there's two of us will take objection, strong. Marcus Handy and me, his partners. And I guess there'll be others. Boys, let's call this thing off. Of course, nobody expects to do anything to the lady. While we're at it, I don't see any sense in chasing that husband of hers—unless the boys have rounded him up already. We've

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got five out of six of the men we wanted. That's doin' da—mighty well." Buck paused as though searching his vocabulary for the proper parliamentary expression before he finished: "I make that in the form of a motion."

"You make what in the form of a motion?" inquired Major Brown dryly.

"All them things," vaguely responded Buck.

It was a challenge. Buck's very physical attitude suggested that. Although he had finished speaking, he did not move away from before the table but stood there straight and poised, facing the crowd. From the belt round the waist of his store-clothes hung his holstered 45-calibre revolver. His hand rested lightly, suggestively, on the butt. Voices broke out; some of them—but a minority, my hopes told me—angry, arguing, protesting.

A woman's scream—rather a woman's squall—tore the air outside. Over a commotion at the door, the same voice shouted: "If you don't keep your hands off me, I'll skin you alive!" So suddenly and precipitately that she seemed to be hurling herself upon us, Mrs. Barnaby stumbled on her thick cowhide boots into the group before the table. As straight as a bullet and almost as forcibly, she hurled herself upon Constance, enfolded her in a motherly embrace whose softness contrasted oddly with the flaming eyes she turned upon the crowd.

"You call yourselves men, don't you?" she said. "Pestering this little girl, you bullies!"

A voice with a kind of juvenile shame in its tones answered:

"Wasn't her we was aimin' to hang."

"You don't mean to tell me," snapped Mrs. Barnaby, "that you're thinkin' of stringin' up this lovesick tenderfoot?"

A nervous titter ran over the crowd. But another voice, tense and hard, answered:

"Sure we're going to!"

"Oh, Sam Barton, how de-do!" replied Mrs. Barnaby. "Sam, tell this crowd how you come buzzin' round my place tryin' to marry this girl an' she gave you the mitten right across

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the jaw where I'd like to lay a pickhandle. If she'd shook that coyote of a husband for you, she'd 'a' done worse."

The titter grew to a laugh. But another voice spoke:

"Go on with the trial!"

"That's Tom McGuire speakin', ain't it?" inquired Mrs. Barnaby. "All right, Tom McGuire, God damn you, before you talk to me about stringin' anybody up, you pay me the two weeks' board you owe me!"

The laughter was a roar now. It rocked the court-room. Raucous, almost hysterical, it let out in one guffaw all the tension of that morning. But Marcus did not laugh. He began saying over and over again to Major Brown: "Put your vote now—holy Moses, put it now! Put it now!"

Major Brown rapped the room to order; but explosive titters were still breaking out in the corners as he said:

"All in favour of hanging Robert Gilson for betraying the Vigilance Committee, say 'aye.'"

Silence.

"The 'noes' have it," announced Major Brown. "Unless there is a motion to the contrary, this court stands indefinitely adjourned!"

CHAPTER XXII

CONSTANCE

MARCUS HANDY and Buck, standing by to the end, kept us in Judge Cowan's court-room until the Vigilance Committee had evaporated, leaving us alone. To accelerate matters, indeed, Marcus ordered that the body of the Killer be cut down, disposed with the others in Doc Evans's window. When this final gruesome business commenced, the last of the Vigilantes jostled out of doors. Mrs. Barnaby, muttering that she couldn't be wasting her time round here, had already given Constance one last hug and departed. To my expressions of gratitude she returned only a scornful grunt. None of us four went to look at the disposal of the Killer; we knew what was happening, and when it was over, only by jerks of phrases from the crowd by the door. Constance sat with her eyes on the floor. Now and then, her lips moved as though she were—not praying—but invoking some fugitive god of chance. Presently, Marcus spoke to her; and his words of solace expressed the anxiety in all our minds:

"I figure he got away. Had nearly half an hour start—and I know that horse. Besides, he's got the whole Rocky Mountains to hide out in. Guess the boys won't chase him far. The ginger's pretty well out of 'em."

"Thank you, Mr. Handy!" said Constance. She moved her lips in what tried to be a smile; but she did not lift her eyes.

A ruffle of drums sounded without; men were running and clamouring again. A shiver which jerked her shoulders against the back of her chair ran over the form of Constance. The ready, understanding Buck was first to see what this meant.

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"Don't worry, Mrs. Deane," he said, "that ain't him. That's the crooks being run out of town!"

This time, fascination drew us all to the window, even Constance. There was no emotion left in me now except a vague curiosity; my own languor of mind and soul seemed to heighten my perceptions; and from my night and day with tragedy I carry away no pictures so vivid as that of the procession which emerged from the Pioneer Corral. Myers of the Variety Theatre marched ahead; drum-major, for the day, of his own band. He wore, as he had done the night before, the rough uniform costume of the time and place; but he gave it the air of a stage costume. His silky moustache was waxed to a needle-point; his muscular actor-face impersonated dramatic authority; and he wielded his baton with military snap, as though it were a musket. The bass and snare drums were playing a slow, solemn march-step; the horn-men held their instruments at ready. Behind them, six abreast, came guards of the Vigilantes; a squad picked from the men wearing parts of Civil War uniforms. As the band turned into Main Street, it struck up a jigging tune which could not drown out a ripple of laughter along the side-walks.

"Rogue's march!" commented Marcus briefly. "Curtain's up on the last act of our show!" And into view marched the prisoners of the Pioneer Corral. The alley from which they emerged ran downhill into Main Street; they came at us full-face. Conway's stubble of beard had grown in the night. His cheeks were as dark as a chimney-sweep's; but he faced his disgrace with a calm and humorous smile. The gambler who had lost his nerve and got religion walked with his head down. Among the dirty and depraved camp-followers of Pearl Street were those who cringed as they came under the eyes of our outraged city, and those who still managed in the pose of head and shoulders to express defiance. Colliver, the lawyer, walked straight, glaring right and left, his eyes made terrible, insane, with suppressed anger. A little, indrawn "Oh!" from Constance signalled the passage of Red Nell. The powder on her cheeks had gathered dust during the night;

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the spots of rouge were no longer bright carmine, but a dull and dirty Indian red. Her frizzes fell in wisps over her forehead. But Red Nell raged no longer. She walked with her eyes down, her hands clasped before her, a ghastly and grotesque caricature of a maiden martyr led to the stake. Whatever womanly dignity remained to her had at the end of all her indignities come to the surface.

Buck caught that smothered exclamation from Constance, and spoke.

"Yep. But you don't know what a bad lot she's been."

Constance looked up at him. Strong eye met strong eye; I could feel the flash of understanding leaping between them across the ether. Yet I was not jealous, I who had played all that night the foolish, frantic lover. This wordless harmony of the soul had nothing whatever to do with the flesh. It was understanding, not affinity; two great, candid spirits, emancipated by courage, who beheld each other and knew.

And Constance would have spoken; only a jerky exclamation from Marcus drew our heads back to the window.

"He's going to be a good boy," said Marcus.

Chris McGrath was coming; among his separate entities, this one was new. I saw that in the first flash, before my eye began to pick up details. His shoulders, once so erectly confident in their carriage, sagged as though he had suddenly grown old. His steps stumbled. His head was bowed. It did not imply sullenness, this averted gaze. Rather was it the attitude of a broken man who cannot bear to look upon disgrace. I understood the policy of self-preservation which Marcus Handy had been applying to this enemy of his. To expel the old, self-reliant Chris McGrath from camp was equivalent to prolonging trouble. He was bound to come back when opportunity served, and to shoot. But his night of mental horrors in the Pioneer Corral, the sight of the lynching, the very psychological weight of public opinion, had served to break his spirit. I remembered him as I saw him first when he stopped the lynching in the Black Jack—a dominant, heroic figure, dowered with a compelling masculine charm—and found

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it in my heart to pity him. After all, he was only misplaced. His virtues of courage, decision, generosity to his friends, rough personal good-fellowship; his faults of rampant individuality and muddled moral distinctions—they belonged to the old era of gun-law. Sudden, offhand Cottonwood had entrusted this anachronism with enforcing that book-law to which our camp and all the West must necessarily come in the end. His night of horror and disgrace and spiritual loneliness may have given him black understanding, taught him that he had been fighting the current of the human spirit. That, possibly, explained the change in him. He was not so much terrified as overwhelmed. At any rate, Cottonwood never heard from him again. Years later, I picked up the remaining threads. He had become a drifter from camp to camp, a protector of gamblers, a dangerous drunkard, until a shot in a brawl at Miles City finished his career. He passed like the grizzly; crushed by progress.

No, I have never been able to cast the first stone at Chris McGrath. Nor, on the other hand, can I justify without reservations the Vigilantes of Cottonwood. True, not only their property but even their lives depended upon sweeping out the old regime, so ill adjusted to progress. True, the five men they killed in various ways that night and morning have not been missed from society. Yet, with a little patience, it could have been accomplished in a better way. We had, after all, a reasonably sound State government to which we might have taken appeal; and back of that stood President Hayes and the United States Army. And the half-legal custom of lynching, which we did our little best to perpetuate, has lived on into the perfected days of book-law, dragging reproach. Essentially, Marcus, Buck, Cohen, Taylor, Myers and all the rest were as time-bound as Chris McGrath. They acted but according to the wisdoms of their period, which stood balanced between the old and the new.

Chris McGrath marched between solid lines of crowd, his bent head now visible, now concealed. A phalanx of Vig-

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ilante guards followed; the crowd closed in behind; the Rogue's march stopped, to be succeeded by the beat of the drums; the deposed King of Cottonwood had passed from his kingdom.

"Where are you sending her?" asked Constance.

"Wagon's waiting to take 'em over the range to Plested's, all comfortable, and drop 'em," replied Marcus.

"Will she——" began Constance, and stopped. For a horseman loped down the street, pulled up at the door of the courthouse, threw his bridle over a lathered head, strode within. The hands of Constance went together; I, who had thought there was no emotion left in me, found my breath coming and going in great sighs.

"Boss," began the messenger—then saw Constance and me, paused.

"All right," said Marcus, "go ahead. These people are safe—they're acquitted."

"Well, we've got no line on where he went," said the horseman. "Trails is too damn trampled. He started down the Ludlow Pass road all right. After that, we loses him. What we need's a regular tracker. Wasn't one in the whole damn outfit."

"Let's see," mused Marcus. "Boys pretty tired, I suppose?"

"Dead!" said the messenger. "Look at me. Up all night. And done a hard day's work yesterday. Horses too."

"All right," announced Marcus. "They're ordered to come in and put up their horses." He paused. "I've already taken other measures to have our man followed—tell 'em that."

"Best news I've heard to-day!" commented the messenger as, with a haste betraying fear lest Marcus should change his mind, he shot through the door, remounted, loped away.

"Another public embarrassment removed from the path of progress, as Harry Ward Beecher would say," remarked Marcus. "If the boys had brought him in, I don't believe this camp would have wanted to hang him—now. Buck, guess our job's done."

Buck and I were looking not at him, however, but at Constance. Across her pallor a flush was mounting, as when the

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rose-dawn touches the snows of the Divide; in her deep-blue eyes a light was shining as when the sunrise strikes on mountain lakes. She held out her hands—the right to Buck, the left to Marcus—who took them sheepishly. Buck, indeed, started the pumphandle motion of a handshake; then, as he perceived that her gesture meant more than that, retained her hand; and a blush inflamed his tanned brow. So she stood for a moment, looking from one to the other.

"I have had friends," she said. "And perhaps you wouldn't like to have me call you friends. But I never dreamed that I should ever ask any friend to do for me what you two wonderful men have done to-day. I can't thank you. It would be ridiculous to try. But if you ever want anything I can do or can't do—let me——" She broke off; her eyes became lakes indeed; she released their hands.

"It's all right—'twasn't nothing!" Buck managed to say.

"I'd do it again for you and more, Mrs. Deane," began the readier Marcus. "You're——" but the lakes were overflowing. Buck first, then Marcus, backed out of the room.

"I want to cry, Robert," said Constance. "Don't—try—to—comfort—me—please. Just watch—to see if anyone's—coming——"

So I stood for a long time, as it seemed to me, and studied Main Street as it settled down to normal. The crowd which followed our branded emigrants out of town came straggling back, half to bed, half to the day's work. Across the street, Piggott the butcher appeared at his show-window hanging up a freshly killed buck as a display. Before Myers' Variety, Fritz the stage-hand was pasting up a lithograph of a gigantic, Percheron-built lady in tights. In the distance began the cheerful, heartening buzz of the saw-mill. Freight-wagons, held up on the edge of the town by the martial law of that morning, resumed their ponderous, squeaking, dusty progress. The stage came in; with much unnecessary profanity back and forth, the driver managed to weave his way through the heavier traffic to the door of Huffaker's Hotel. It drew up dramatically, discharged its load of voyagers in linen dusters.

A crowd changing constantly in personnel stood before the window of Doc Evans's undertaking-parlour, where lay displayed the wreckage of lynch-law. But even that diminished as I watched. No other sign remained to memorialize our spasm of rough virtue or mob-rule or whatever else one wishes to call it, except the guards standing at the doors of the closed saloons and gambling-houses, surrounding the jail-door. Watching, I beheld there the last spasm of declining action. Over from the Pioneer Corral a Vigilante squad escorted back to jail the legitimate prisoners, held for trial under the book-law of a new era.

And my weary spirit, like that of Cottonwood Camp, dealt again with its commonplaces. After the storms of last night, after my peril and deliverance, where was I? Still I loved Constance Deane. And Constance Deane loved me. I knew that now, as I had merely hoped it before. What then? The essential situation had not changed. The violence of the night had killed five men; it had not served to break the fetter of that wedding-ring. Better for me if lynch-law—without my help, of course—had done justice on Martin Deane. Yet, having become again the Robert Gilson I had always known, I could not really wish that. At the end of our adventure, where together we had confessed love and faced death, I could see only parting.

The voice of Constance, sweet with passing tears, spoke behind me.

"I think I'm all right now, Robert."

She had dried her eyes; the tears had left only a faint flush under the lids; but when she tried to smile, her lips quivered. She rose, tucked her handkerchief under the belt of her bodice, and:

"I think I'd better go home now," she said.

"I'm going with you," I replied.

She hesitated, as though restrained by some little, instinctive fear of the proprieties; then, as realizing how ridiculous that was in face of our situation, smiled—firmly now—and replied:

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"Do—I want, of course, to tell you everything."

So we walked together into Main Street. Naturally, we attracted attention. I could feel with the back of my head that the crowd about Doc Evans's window had turned from that old sensation to this new one, had stared and pointed. Now and then a head craned from a window, or I heard a rush of feet at a doorway. Eyes ahead, we walked in silence up the familiar path—should I ever tread it again?—to Mrs. Barnaby's.

Mrs. Barnaby's self came running out to throw her arms about Constance, to lead her, with pats and caresses and such childish phrases and love-words as I could never have believed were in her vocabulary, to the door of their tent. She broke this soft mood once to throw back at me:

"I bet you started all this trouble on my pretty—you splay-footed tenderfoot." But neither Constance nor I protested; we estimated Mrs. Barnaby's vitriol at its true value. Like the mother who shakes her child because it has just escaped death, she was merely working off her nerves. Indeed, she left us at the tent-door, having given Constance a final kiss on the cheek. She had "red up," as she would have expressed it herself, until that rough habitation expressed fairly military orderliness lightened by touches of the feminine. The door-flaps, tied back, lay open to the warm, pure airs of the summer morning. Without asking permission, I entered. Constance threw off her shawl, seated herself on the bed; I sank into the single chair.

"You're simply worn out, Robert," she said, searching my face.

"No; and if I were, I want to talk nevertheless," I said. Indeed, I was not at the moment tired; only conscious of a curious inner fever and of a bruise or ache here and there—the hand which I had struck against the door-frame of the Black Jack, the hip upon which I had fallen when I fought Martin Deane to the ground, the shin which had been barked in the struggle by the jail-door. And yet sudden spurts of something very like sleep would now and then drop me for a

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moment to unconsciousness; and when I jerked myself wide awake, I would discover that the sentence at whose beginning I went to sleep, was not yet finished.

Yet, at first, we talked round the subject. She was not entirely reassured that Deane had escaped. I must needs give her comfort on that. We matched notes a little on the events of the morning, compared our sensations, until we drew too near the event which it were better for us to forget; her shudder stopped that. Once I asked: "What you said before they arrested me—you mean that, Constance?" She answered: "I meant it then. I mean it now. I mean it for ever!" But we did not thereupon kiss or clasp hands, as unfettered lovers may after such words; only sat for a time silent and looked at each other. She spoke then of her gratitude to Buck and Marcus, especially Buck; and hoped they had lost nothing through their goodness to her. "He gave me courage," she said of Buck. "As soon as I saw him standing by you, I knew he would not let you be killed."

A spurt of sleep or what resembled sleep; when I came out of it, feverishly awake, she was talking:

"—my own fault, my very own in the beginning, Robert. A little of it sin—if you want to call it that. The rest just folly. Perverse folly. I was only seventeen when I eloped with him from Miss Gorham's academy at Providence. That was the beginning. I shan't lay that to anyone else. But I will tell you how it happened:

"We lived at Warwick—do you know it? A little old Rhode Island town. The family had been there for ever. My mother was younger than my father. She died when I was six years old. I had no brothers or sisters.

"My father married again—a beautiful woman, a brilliant woman, but unbalanced. Perhaps insane. I wouldn't have had the charity to make that excuse for her once. I hated her. But I think, now, I shall never hate anyone else so long as I live. She was cruel to me—insanely cruel—because she was jealous. I have been beaten, terribly beaten, in my day, Robert. But more than that. The trick of putting me in

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the wrong. . . . Perhaps that was why Father sent me away to school—to Miss Gorham's in Providence. From the time I was seven until I was seventeen—just school. At first I came home for the holidays. But finally she spoiled even that. She had a terrible hold on Father. I can understand that, too. She was a beautiful creature. Fine black hair that had green lights in its shadows—not purple like most black hair. A white skin without any lights in it whatever, and all the more wonderful because of that. Dark eyes which never twice looked the same—sometimes as soft as melted velvet, and sometimes furious, deadly. She could love as immoderately as she hated. I have experienced that. Once, before she sent me away, she threw a scent-bottle at me. If it had hit me squarely, it might have killed me. But it only bruised my shoulder. And the way she held me and kissed me—it frightened me more than her hate. That was her hold on my father as much as her beauty, I suppose—the insane ardour in her love. Something with an unearthly fascination. I can quite understand. But I loved my father, after all. And yearned for him terribly. And I am to blame, somewhat. It made me a sullen little girl—toward them.

“I'm not going to pity myself, Robert. And don't you pity me. But behind what I did finally were four years in which I never went home once; though Warwick is only twenty miles or so away from Providence. Summers at the school—except one when I visited. Christmas holidays alone in the dormitory with two old-maid teachers. They sympathized with me, and were very kind. Everyone was very kind. Women—except my stepmother—have always been so good to me! Clear down to Mrs. Barnaby, the dear, beautiful, cantankerous old soul! Christmas presents, plenty of them, from my father; but after the first pleasure I took in them, I used to cry over them because the one thing I wanted wasn't there.

“Then I came seventeen, and was going to finish next year—music and needlework and Latin and French and riding and dancing and deportment, and nothing whatever about life. I hadn't even read a novel, except surreptitiously. I wasn't a little

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girl any longer, of course. I had become a woman. That's the period, I suppose, when every girl ought to be locked up for a while. Probably the French are right. And of course with me—the one thing I never had was love. It's all mixed up to me now, like a delirium. Periods of religious exaltation. Periods of—the reverse. Yards of foolish poetry. An ideal, imaginary lover. I used to go to bed just after night prayers in order to lie and talk with him. . . . I'd scarcely as yet spoken face to face with a man, you know—or what a young girl with a rich imagination would call a man. Just drawing-teachers and dancing-masters and Peter the gardener about the school.

"He was the first—Martin. He came to the seminary about a piece of land they were buying for a new building. I was a favourite with Miss Gorham—partly, I suppose, because she pitied me, and partly because I'd made myself useful. I was a kind of volunteer clerk to her. I was glad to have something practical to do. The school routine—but never mind that. You have seen him. He is bonny yet. But that was five years ago. I never thought of my ideal lover of nights after that—only him. Miss Gorham had to go out to look for some papers. I was left alone with him for half an hour. She wouldn't have done that usually. It shows how much she trusted me. Before she came back, it had gone pretty far. I had promised to write to him. He had arranged to put letters to me under a boundary stone on the new property. I wrote to him every night. And I saw him three times. A girl in love can manage that, you know. Once, for instance, our history class was visiting the State House to improve our minds and I got lost—purposely. No one ever suspected me. I always seemed, I suppose, like an obedient little thing. His letters were wonderful. That isn't just glamour. I read them over again just before I came West. He truly loved me. There were other considerations. I'll tell about them later. But he loved me.

"And we eloped. I proposed it. I just walked away from the school one night after supper, and met him. We took the

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train to Newport together and were married. He had arranged everything. It had to be arranged. I lied, of course, about my age.

"I nearly turned back at the gate of the school. I had a flash of conscience or reason or whatever you want to call it. Only it was more than that. It told me not only what I was doing, but where it was going to lead. I saw it all perfectly. I even saw him as he was. And I went on—because I hated. It was a defiance to my stepmother. It would bring the disgrace of an elopement on the family. Don't forget that, Robert. This may not seem important to you now, but it is.

"It all got into the papers. Probably the marriage could have been annulled. But Father did nothing about that. I suppose my stepmother was only too glad to get rid of me for good. I wrote to Father. He answered with a dreadful letter. Martin Deane tried to see him, and couldn't. Martin was piqued. You see, Father was rich. And—well, I have said that Martin's motives were all mixed up. But he loved me. He truly did. You see, if he hadn't loved me, he wouldn't have married me. I was so young and inexperienced, he could have fooled me, easily enough. . . .

"And I loved him, but only in one way. I didn't know that then. I loved his good humour and that lock of hair on his forehead, and his love-making and his reckless physical courage—you can see how that would thrill a young girl. He was always risking his life. I've seen him, again and again, jump out of the dormer-window of our house on to the eaves, and walk along them smiling back at me. And all the time, while I was begging him to come back, I was fascinated. But the other side—the one you hold to longest in people you love—he hadn't that side, Robert.

"I didn't see it at first. I do remember watching him one day from the front window as he walked down the street, and feeling that there was something lacking—but just for a minute. I didn't know for a long time—I was so young and inexperienced—about the condition of his business. He was in real estate, as I've told you. We lived very prettily. I

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wasn't much taken with the business friends he brought home to supper; as I look back now, I think of them all as a little unclean spiritually. Nor their wives. I was hungry for my own kind of women. . . .

"He used to talk to me, of course, about the business. But I was like a nun, for all I knew of the world. A more experienced woman would have understood much sooner—that it was all wrong—every bit of it wrong. But he told me one night about a transaction I did understand. He had for sale a piece of property belonging to a man who lived in England. The value had gone up. He was in conspiracy with the agent of a real-estate company which wanted the property. He was going to sell it for ten thousand dollars and give his client five thousand. And he and the other agent were going to divide the difference. It meant falsifying papers, of course. I said: 'But that would be dishonest.' He laughed. But I persisted. I showed him how it seemed to me. And I begged him. He said finally: 'I suppose you're right.' And he gave up his—his plan. That's another thing I wish you'd remember, Robert—when I pointed out the wrong in it, he saw and listened to me.

"Then—he was arrested. It was all a very bad piece of business. The papers were full of it. We gave up our house. We moved into a furnished room. He was tried finally—and acquitted. Mostly, he'd been just within the law. But he hadn't done right nevertheless; and everyone knew it. He took it hard, of course. He was—rebellious. We quarrelled, too. But I made him understand that it was wrong.

"Troubles came all together. My father died. I went to him at the last—my stepmother could not prevent. I won't—I can't now—tell you all about that. But I knew he loved me; and that if I hadn't made a wrong-headed little fool of myself by eloping with Martin Deane—we'd have found a way in spite of my stepmother. Then I was very ill—typhoid fever. I nearly died. Martin stayed by. My father had made a

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codicil to his will a month before his death. He left me ten thousand dollars. Some of that was needed to pay our debts. . . .

"When I was better, Martin and I talked it all over. There was no use of staying in Providence. He wanted to go West and start again—honestly. I gave him half of my money. He was to get settled and send for me. I wasn't in condition to travel. I got my strength back very slowly. I had much time to myself—I was very, very lonely. And I suppose when you're in such a state as I was then, and have been so near death—you see things more clearly. I had been greatly to blame. I ran away with him in the beginning as much to spite my stepmother as for any other reason. I didn't really love him as I might have loved—a good man. But I loved him enough. He'd never once been harsh or cruel to me. That's a great deal, isn't it? And I could show him the right way. I'd proved that. He had never grown up, on one side of him, and never would. He didn't see right and wrong clearly—just as a little boy doesn't. But he was sentimental and loving like a little boy, and could be handled by his affections. He was reckless like a little boy, too. That was the defect of his wonderful courage. Often, I think, things which weren't quite straight or right appealed to him because they were dangerous. I thought a good deal of my stepmother's case. If she, by the hold she had on a man, could handle him for bad ends, why couldn't I do the same for good ends? I won't pretend to you, Robert, that I didn't have moments when I was tempted to leave him. But I knew that if I did, I could never be happy. I should always be thinking of him out in the world, with no one to take care of—of his soul. That's what it comes down to, Robert. Saving his soul. At bottom, you know, I'm religious. . . ."

She paused; her eyes, great and tender with shadow of old suffering, clutched mine and seemed to plead for approval. I could not withhold it.

"I see you believe all this, Constance," I said.

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"It was my job. My job for life. He went to Wyoming—last summer. He wrote now and then. I wrote constantly. He was doing well, he said. Business. He wasn't very definite about the business. In the winter he moved to Denver. I addressed him through the general delivery. I wrote that I was coming to him in the spring. He advised me to wait awhile. Said he wasn't quite settled. But I knew the longer I waited, the harder it would be. In the spring I started. I wrote to say when I would arrive. He wasn't waiting at the station. . . .

"I was some time finding where he had stayed in Denver. The postmaster would tell me nothing. Probably he could tell me nothing. But one of Martin's notes to me was on the letterhead of the Cañon House in Denver. It's a hotel down by the railroad station. Not a very pleasant place. I talked to the clerk. He was rough at first. I had to tell him a little about myself before he grew sympathetic and helpful. No one named Deane had lived there. I described Martin. He said: 'Wait a minute!' and took me to a room where they store things they want to leave behind until called for. He opened a bundle. There was a grey muffler with a border of red horses which I had knitted for Martin the first year we were married. The clerk said: 'He didn't call himself Deane here, but Maxwell.' You may imagine what that did to me. . . . Maxwell had gone to Cottonwood a month before. I asked the clerk what Maxwell had done for a living in Denver. He evaded that.

"So I started for Cottonwood. You know the rest——"

"Not all the rest, Constance," I said.

"No, not all. That's true. The postmaster here was kinder than the one in Denver. No letters for anyone named Deane. One for a Maxwell. I looked him up. He was a miner. But I knew Martin wouldn't keep far from this camp. It was the kind of place where he *would* stay. I asked questions—people must have wondered why I asked so many questions——"

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I did not tell her how much people had wondered, nor what sinister conclusions such as Shorty had drawn.

"I was temporizing really. I know that now. Temporizing because—of you."

Constance dropped her eyes to her clasped hands.

"I couldn't have said all this to you if I hadn't been through—what happened to-day. Even if things had gone—happily—if that had been possible—I would have been a long time bringing myself—to say this. But when I looked at you first—I knew. I knew you were everything I had ever loved in Martin Deane and, oh, all I was hungry for! And you came here. I was holding you at arm's length, Robert. I fooled myself into thinking that made it right. Of course it didn't. But it was lovely, heavenly, after what I'd lived through and before what I must live the rest of my life—just to dream. To see you every day—and know you loved me—and to go to bed early—to think of you. But it was wrong. It was where I very nearly failed——"

I burst out here:

"You mustn't say that! I went out to capture your husband last night because I was jealous——"

"Yes, you have told me that. How did you know—how did you connect him with me?"

"That horse—the one in the bushes at the stage robbery—I've told you about that—I saw him on it last night—followed him—saw him here with you——" Her self-accusation spurred me on. I could not bear that she should think herself worse than I.

"Poor Robert! I had given you much provocation!" was all she said to that. "And then—I found him. I was riding up the trail to Forty-Rod. He came out of the pines. He was riding a black horse. Of course he was astonished. And yet he was glad. He—I felt he still loved me, in spite of the way he'd kept me in the East. That was the main thing, Robert. Not that I wanted him to love me—with you in the world. But so long as he loved me—there was a chance. He was

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mining above Forty-Rod. They expected to strike it soon, he said. Three weeks would tell the story. Then he'd come down to me. And we'd go away together. If I wanted to go away. And I did. It hurt, but I did. I was afraid—with you in Cottonwood, Robert. I asked to go up and stay with him at Forty-Rod. But he wouldn't have that. He said the place was too rough. He asked me not to tell anyone, for the present, that I had a husband here. Just let things stand as they were—for three weeks. I said: 'Martin, you've gone wrong again!' He laughed and said: 'Not very.'

"And I came home, and did let things stand as they were. It was only three weeks, after all. And I would see you—and then no more. But my duty kept bearing in on me. And one day—I rode up to the claim on Forty-Rod——"

"The day——" I interrupted. Constance raised her eyes to mine, gave a quick nod.

"The day you met me coming back. I went to the claim. I saw those men"—her hand gave a little outward gesture and she shuddered; the eye of my mind beheld the dishonoured lying-in-state in Doc Evans's window. "And the horse you saw at the stage robbery—the buckskin with the peculiar spot—was tethered by the door. If you had not happened to tell me about that horse, I wonder how differently things would have come out? There were five men at the claim, too. And five at the stage robbery.

"I got Martin to take a walk up the hill-side. I said: 'You men robbed the Cottonwood stage—when I was aboard.' He said: 'You always were intuitive, Constance.' He had the attitude toward it which I'd have expected. It was just a lark. They needed money to develop the claim, he said. So they went and got it. He said I mustn't judge the West on Eastern standards. Everyone did something of the sort. I talked to him—as I had at the time of the trial in Providence. And—I made him see. I wanted him to come straight away with me. But he stuck to the original plan. They were on the verge of a strike, he said. Then he'd sell out and we'd go to Chicago and start again. It was only two weeks now. I

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told him that when he sold out, he must pay back to the stage company his share of what he'd stolen. He was willing to do that. Then I met you on the road—and was weak—and warned you. . . .

"Last night he came to the tent. Came, he said, just because he wanted to see me. He had been drinking. That isn't one of his vices, usually. He said that things were going wonderfully. He'd be ready in two or three days to take me away. I made him promise to go straight back to the claim. I wanted to go with him to his horse. He objected to that. But he promised——"

"And broke his promise!" I interpolated hotly.

"I think he intended to, nevertheless. But when he met his—friends—again, he couldn't very well back out without seeming a coward. And he hates to seem a coward. I heard the shots last night, but someone is always shooting at night. Mrs. Barnaby told me this morning—about the robbery and the Vigilance Committee. She's the only person I've ever taken into my confidence, and she not far. Probably she's guessed some of the rest. I found they'd killed three men at Forty-Rod, and had two in the jail—to hang. I went to the jail. Through the side-window, I saw Martin. I appealed to you. And you saved me. That's all, I think."

Her shoulders, held so proudly erect, drooped now.

"No, it wasn't all," I said. "Haven't you had enough, Constance? You surely don't hope——"

Her eyes lifted sombrely to mine as she interrupted:

"I'm not thinking of hope. There is very little hope perhaps—now. All I know is that I am still the one chance he has. And that I still have a hold. He came to me, of all the women in Cottonwood, when he was drunk last night. I must follow him—try to find him. Probably he's gone back to Denver. The clerk at the Cañon House will help me. It is a bad place—I know that. But the clerk pities me. And when I find him—of course, that isn't pleasant to contemplate. My money is nearly gone. I shall be poor. Perhaps—he will go to jail. And I shall be a convict's wife. But, Robert, what

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would you think of a woman who abandoned her child just because it was idiotic or crippled or vicious? I'd be doing the same thing. More. If I should get a common divorce and marry you, it would be to me as though we had conspired to kill him to get him out of the way."

Her eyes, until now so dry and solemnly thoughtful, welled for an instant with tears. But she checked them as by effort of the will.

"My poor Robert!" she said. "I never seem able to do quite right, no matter how hard I try. I haven't done right toward you. But you see, when I go away it must be parting. You must get over it. You will. Life holds so much for you——"

"I shall never get over it," I said. "Never in eternity. And you are a saint!" In that last sentence I had expressed my renunciation. Borne upward on the wings of her resolve, I could no more plead with her the cause of her own smaller happiness than I could have asked a martyr of my faith, at the stake, to purchase life by recantation. The very realization of the thing I had been last night gave strength to my own resolution.

"It is your soul I have been loving all this time, Constance," I said, "and I cannot deny your soul. I think you will fail, because I think you are trying something which cannot succeed. And then I will come to you again. For I shall never love anyone else. He may have you, but you are always mine."

"Yes, Robert, always yours!" she said.

"But I must go with you—until you find him."

She shook her head.

"No, Robert. I must come to him with a clean record. It is part of my hold on him. After what happened this morning—it would not look clean to the world or to him."

I saw that, too.

"You must promise me that if the time comes when I may help cleanly—you will let me."

"I promise. What are you going to do, Robert?"

I had not thought of that. But with her very words, a

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resolution as strong and quixotic as her own leaped into my mind.

"I shall stay here and face it—if there is anything to face," I said. "I am a rich man, you know, Constance," I added. "I don't mean my mining property—but I never have to think of money. I could go East and put this behind me. But I want to face it. Because I'll be nearer you. And because you—because I can't let you be any stronger than I."

She nodded slowly, solemnly.

"That's good," she said. "Not the part about me—but about you. It is you as I'd like you to be." Then she smiled, almost like her old self in her merry moods. "Can't we forget this morning—for a moment? And oh, Robert, you are so tired! You've had a dreadful, dreadful night and day! You must sleep now."

"Sleep!" I said. "When I have a few hours with you and may not see you for years!" But even as I spoke, a rush of inner drowsiness made insincere my words.

Constance looked outside. The tent-flaps gaped wide, making visible this rude apartment to all the world.

"This camp doubtless thinks about as scandalously of you and me as it can," she said. "Look, Robert—I'm going to make you lie down on my bed."

Had I been myself, I should have protested. As it was, I yielded like a sleepy child. She wet a towel, washed my face. She loosened my collar. Her touch, which normally roused every fibre in me, was now heavenly-soothing. She held my shoulders as I stretched out my aching muscles on the white sheet-counterpane; she knelt beside me, holding and patting my hand. Once she looked swiftly out of doors, then bent and kissed my forehead. I raised my other hand to embrace her, but she put it gently back. . . . I was gone. . . .

A light shone in my face. I sprang up sitting. Twilight without. Mrs. Barnaby shading an oil lamp with her hand.

"Seven o'clock!" said Mrs. Barnaby. "Your boss has been lookin' over the hull camp for you. Says he's wanted at town-

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meetin' and you've got to get out the paper, though why it should get out——"

"Where's Constance—Mrs. Deane?" I asked.

"Her? Oh, she took the two o'clock stage to Denver. Didn't she tell you she was goin' to?"

CHAPTER XXIII

I COME THE REST OF THE WAY

THE chills of a mountain autumn fell suddenly on the pure, warm glories of a mountain summer. The rains came; but no longer as in virile July did they break violently from sun-shot mists. They were gentle rains, and caressing. When finally their generating clouds lifted in streamers and filaments, the peaks were veiled in light, transparent snow. A brilliant sun, breaking out suddenly, would within an afternoon strip away this evanescent mantle; but at each melting, the snow-cap on the ranges lay deeper and lower. Then the sun no longer availed; as in the day when first I looked into the valley, the white lay unbroken above timberline. Across the black belts of forest, autumn-turned aspens painted streaks of blood-red. That fringe of cottonwoods along the creek—to whose presence in these altitudes our camp owed its name—made in their tints pale imitation of autumn maples. The elk, victims to their own proud bulk and nobility of mien, came stalking down from their pastures of timberline clover to die at the hands of our experienced hunters; dawns and twilights reverberated with gunshots.

Then an early snow, heavy for these semi-arid mountains, blew down a cold west wind from the Mother of Ranges. It drifted thirty feet deep in the gulches; on the ranges it filled the clefts and runways, softening their sharp outlines until they seemed to lie under a coverlet. Behind it came Arctic cold. Cottonwood stacked up huge woodpiles, built tropic fires, swathed its collective legs in gunny-sacks, muffled its generic neck in flannel cloths or "comforters," wrapped its corporate torso in buffalo-coats or bearskins. For days we were snowed

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in—a little, busy, good-humoured world of our own. Then gangs sent forth by the stage company and the freighting-companies forced the passes. The great double wagons—carrying for the time being mainly stoves—came in festooned with hoar-frost.

I have written of climate and scenery first; for as I write I renew my mood in those months when my hands and mind were busy and my soul empty. The world had gone out of me and the universe had flowed in. My spirit looked from the prison behind my eyes; felt the glories of cloud and mountain light, the subtle colour in sun-touched fields of snow, the heavenly promise in mountain lakes, the infinity beyond our violent stars, with a poignant intensity which, even in meditative age, I was never again to know. But this dwelt in my private domain of the soul, uncorrelated with those surges of misery which swept over me intermittently, and with my activities on the surface of things.

My decision to stay at Cottonwood and face it all down proved ridiculously more easy than I thought when I matched nobilities with Constance. Disgrace is a coward; it retreats before a bold front. The indifferent world in the end always takes toward it the attitude that you take yourself. Nor, indeed, did Cottonwood probably think me disgraced. They gossiped, of course; I had for a long time an uncomfortable sense that groups had pointed me out when I passed. But to my face men showed only cordiality—sometimes a trifle overdone, and more galling than public reproach.

Even that had passed. A mining-camp runs with bewildering speed its course from birth to senile decay. Twenty years of Europe! In a month Cottonwood lived a cycle of Cathay. Before August blew the petals from the white columbines, decked the forests with their flaunting sisters in red and yellow, we had become a new entity. Events a few weeks before were as ancient history as though they had happened to my grandfather.

The *Courier*, in its daily editorial on our future and prospects, called us a "permanent camp." Unconscious irony of

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Western slang, since nature denies to a mining-camp exactly that quality of permanence! The treasure which men take from the earth cannot be restored; each discovery is a draft on a bankrupt future. But, ignoring the obvious, we built as though for eternity. Hayden Hill turned out a bonanza. Strike followed strike in the deeper levels of Liverpool Hill. With that, with the new atmosphere in camp, civilization marched upon us in force. A railroad began blasting its way up from Pledsted's. No longer was it necessary for me to filch and invent our outland news; for a telegraph line had been strung across the passes from Denver; and Marcus, while boasting in the paper of his American Press Association service, groaned privately over the expense.

The day of false values passed. We were really producing now. Stamp-mills, their heavy machinery freighted over the passes by sixteen-mule teams, were turning our bulky quartz ore into concentrates. Even ahead of the railroad, a small smelter had accomplished the same miracle of transportation, and was blasting the forests and herbage with its fumes of sulphur and arsenic. We opened a public school in a log-cabin, laid the foundations for a brick schoolhouse. To our churches we added a Jewish synagogue and a Baptist meeting-house. Mr. Howells started work on his own Episcopalian church. Myers' Variety imported extra talent and gave us a two weeks' run of "The Black Crook." A stock company from Denver erected a temporary stage in Odd Fellows' Hall; on nights when this structure was not needed for lodge-meetings, produced "East Lynne," "The Shaughran" and—to the disgust of the Southern element—"Uncle Tom's Cabin." Cheap Jack Eckstein, clothier, had become Eckstein and Co., Dry Goods. His show-windows now displayed not the necessities of dress, but its luxuries—silks, sealskin sacques, braided dolmans, laces, bonnets like flower-beds. For our favourites of fortune mostly elected, like Buck, to "spend it here." A syndicate from Denver rushed work on a hotel rivalling—nay, exceeding—Huffaker's in size and luxury. It even advertised a bathroom on every floor.

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Not that Jim Huffaker had much to fear from competition. The new rush was still on; again men slept about saloon-stoves or under billiard-tables. He had made his place, even before the brief Vigilante flare-up, the club of Cottonwood and himself the centre of man-society. In the hour of trouble, Jim played safe. Two days before the robbery of the Cottonwood Bank, he had gone to Denver on a "business trip"; he did not return for a week. There were those who believed that he had stage-managed this little business excursion; that, having a hint in advance concerning the intentions of the Vigilantes, he had avoided taking sides. This seemed to me always more worthy of credence than most gossip; it fitted with his character. Some there were, indeed, among the more ardent Vigilantes who absented themselves from his hotel for at least a fortnight. But they came back in the end. At Huffaker's table was the best fare in camp; at Huffaker's bar the best fellowship. Upstairs, in his largest room, ran all night a private poker game for the very elect—mine-owners all, and therefore purchasers of mining-hardware. Jim, like me, had learned that it's all in your own attitude.

Buck, whenever the demands on his time permitted, sat in with the elect of Huffaker's poker game; and there, as elsewhere, he ruled supreme. Buck had become the figure of our camp; the stage-drivers used to point him out to tenderfoot tourists as the King of Cottonwood. Legend had already draped him in a glittering mantle; he figured as sole discoverer, through his own shrewdness, of Hayden Hill; rumour multiplied his wealth. When the temporary municipal government formed on the night of the lynching and headed by Major Brown gave way to a permanent town charter, the old Central Committee wanted him to run for mayor. Buck, however, brushed that crown lightly aside. "Too much trouble," he said. He did accept, however, honorary chieftainship in the fire department. The chief's helmet of red and gold, which arrived with the consignment of uniforms from New York, may have influenced this decision. He had chosen a lot at the summit of Huffaker's Addition for his new house. He

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would not build until spring, however. In the meantime he had transformed a big log-cabin into a monument to his own taste. "Three thousand dollars' worth of furniture in the front room alone," he announced proudly when I came to write up his new residence. And he swept a hand decked with a five-carat ring over chairs and sofas in heavy black walnut grooved with gold, thick, glossy rugs, violent red oil paintings—not of oceans, lakes or cities, but of sunsets in the Rockies. On the night after the furniture arrived, he gave a house-warming for the aristocracy of the camp, and they all came; even Mrs. Hamilton Taylor.

Shorty was not among us to share these glories. He had gone down to Denver to see whether he really wanted a divorce or no. Eventually, moved by the wondrous kindness of the lady in view of changed circumstances, he decided that he did not. That winter he sold out to Buck, and—miracle among old-time mining-men—invested the money. He kept it to the end; compelled thereto, I have heard, by Mrs. Croly. Buck, with his carbonate ore now smelted almost at tunnel-mouth, found means to expand. As fast as the money came in, he invested it, recklessly and yet with considerable mining sense, in Cottonwood properties. And before winter locked the passes, the Saratoga, in which he had bought a half-interest from a discouraged locator, struck a carbonate deposit so rich that all Cottonwood long believed it that mythical, non-existent El Dorado, the "main body." Of Buck and the end to his enterprises, I hope I may some day write again.

Buck and his fortunes, however, have nothing to do with Constance Deane, heart and soul of my early days in Cottonwood. Two weeks after she left me sleeping in Mrs. Barnaby's tent, she wrote to me from Denver. On the surface, this was merely a friendly letter such as any married woman might address to a young man who had rendered her service. Yet the intention shines through the written expression; and as by an arrangement of words too subtle for analysis, I knew that Constance Deane had not changed toward me, never would change. She had found Martin Deane; had seen him once.

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"But he thinks it better, considering his position, that we should not be together for the present—either here or travelling," she wrote. I was trying to answer her in the properly guarded manner, when a perplexing consideration gave me pause. Were the mails safe for the wife of Martin Deane? This question I could not myself answer; and that night, as we were undressing, I broached the matter to Marcus—did it with a casual air which must have betrayed me to his shrewd understanding.

"Wouldn't be safe at all," he said, "if those pests had robbed the United States mails. Uncle Sam never stops. There'd be a shadow on him and everybody connected with him—especially Mrs. Deane. But they didn't; so Uncle Sam is out. The state authorities aren't mixing and mingling any more with the private affairs of Cottonwood; and as for Holton County, there's a lot of details in our own recent performances that won't stand narrow legal investigation. No, I don't expect that any minion of the law will trouble himself to steam open Mrs. Deane's letters to you—or yours to her. Where is she?"

"Denver."

"H'm—pretty close! Are they living together?"

"No. Not for the present. She thinks it wouldn't be exactly safe." The conversation was growing more uncomfortably intimate than I had intended to make it.

"Using good judgment there, I guess. The only danger is that some nosy party from Cottonwood will see them together and start embarrassing inquiries. She'd be recognized quicker by anyone from this camp than he would. Embarrassing to us up here, too. Just as well for them to keep apart until this blows over. Wouldn't advise 'em to stay in Denver permanent. But if they travel together—yes, better let it stand as it is, my advice. Does she imagine that she can reform that coyote?"

"Yes. She thinks it's her duty."

"Ain't women wonderful!" Marcus must have seen my hands clench at this sarcasm, for he added: "Best woman I ever saw. But she's lettin' her goodness fool her. Tell you

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what I'll do, though. I'll see the proper people, and make sure her mail isn't bothered." There, feeling that I had already stripped my soul as far as I could bear, I closed the conversation by rolling into bed.

That the word of Marcus would be all-potent with the State authorities, I never doubted. The turn of events had placed him and his newspaper in a curious position of power and influence. That night when Constance Deane left me, I had found at the office directions for getting out the paper. In preferred position, front page, right column, I was to run a brief notice stating that the city had been taken over by the Vigilance Committee; that five dangerous citizens—names as follows—had been "dispensed with" and twenty-two—names as follows—advised to leave camp and not to return. Martin Deane's name figured on the second list. Without hesitation, I cut it out; and Marcus never referred to the omission.

Marcus came in late from the "town-meeting," bringing two other brief notices which were also given preferred position. One informed the public that the better citizens of Cottonwood, in convention assembled, had formed a temporary town government and elected William C. Brown mayor. The other set forth that certain county officials, as noted below, had resigned, and before resigning had signed a joint call for a special county election. This would be held as soon as notice could be sent to the outlying districts. Pending action by the State Legislature, Cottonwood would be temporary county seat. Finally Marcus, swaying with weariness, ripped off a brief editorial distinguished for what it did not reveal, entitled "A New Deal." We of the *Courier* were correspondents for the Denver newspapers. Next day we sent down a guarded story, veiling the "removal" of the four bandits and Charlie Meek with the sensational political overturn in Holton County. The Denver newspapers wrote back demanding more particulars concerning the bandits. Secure in our position—for the Denver newspapers could find no other correspondent in Cottonwood—we let these communications go unanswered. A garbled version,

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picked up in Cottonwood by an ore-buyer, did finally reach the Denver press; since it in no wise connected the lynching with local politics, it served our purpose better than silence.

However, the turn of events plunged Marcus up to his neck in municipal affairs. To make Cottonwood the county seat involved approval of the State authorities, including the Legislature. It was an issue on which there could be no doubt. Already we had nearly ten times the voting-power of the Grizzly district; and a politician's heart goes with the votes. But it needed negotiation, lest some opponent expose the story of our illegal proceedings when we cleaned up the camp. Their courage renewed by immunity, Judge Cowan and his fellows began to fight. Marcus had by his initiative and imagination controlled the Vigilance Committee. His prestige held over into the new era; he became for a time the benevolent boss of our camp. He conceived the idea of dividing the county. That was sensible, he pointed out. Grizzly and Cottonwood were too far apart for efficient collective government. It all required negotiation, however. Once he visited Denver; and repeatedly politicians from what he used to call contemptuously "the lowlands" came to him hat in hand. Had he chosen, Marcus might have gone far in politics. But he laughed at the very suggestion. "I like to do things," he said; "that lets me out. Pretty I'd feel, after puncturin' and penetratin' skin games all my life, to stand up in a Prince Albert coat and skin the public myself." No able man whom I have ever known cared less for power than Marcus Handy. When we formed the permanent municipal government, he, like Buck, was "mentioned" for mayor. Buck put aside the toga with allusions to his appreciation of the compliment; but Marcus only laughed.

So I wrote to Constance Deane, giving her advice as of my own inception. It was three weary weeks before she wrote again—a little pleasant narration of her circumstances in Denver, her friendly regards to Marcus and Buck; and, at the end, "circumstances in the matter most vital to me stand exactly as they were—my husband, I mean."

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In all, I had six letters from her that autumn—I have them yet. After that, she did not refer again even to Martin Deane; only the fourth said:

"If there is any change in my situation, I shall let you know at once."

In the fifth she said:

"I have gone to work. Did I tell you that they considered my French very good at school? We did at least have a real Frenchwoman for a teacher. I'm taking young lady pupils privately. It's much more interesting and amusing, really, than I would have thought."

Plainly, she was running out of funds. I composed and destroyed five letters before I achieved an offer tactful enough to suit the circumstances. She answered with all her old candour:

"Thank you, Robert. Of course I can take care of myself. I have two more pupils and an offer—which I cannot accept as things stand—from a private school. Even, Yankee that I am, I have been saving money. But if funds are ever needed for the main object"—she had underlined these two last words—"I promise I shall write to you at once. It must of course be a loan. . . ."

Meantime, I had resumed my regular correspondence with Mother, much neglected of late. Into it I poured something of the soul and fervour with which I would have liked to infuse my letters to Constance. The shrewd eye of motherhood seemed dimly and uneasily to perceive the meaning behind this change; her commonplaces about Cohasset were sprinkled with hints that I must have had enough of the West. By November, indeed, she advised me openly to come home, at least for the winter. "I want to look you over, Robert!" she wrote. Poor Mother—I thought—if she only knew! And I speculated on happiness, as one will in the depths of misery, imagining her in the capacity of mother-in-law.

If I had met Constance in ordinary happy circumstances, wooed her serenely and according to the normal pattern of courting in Mother's time and place, I had no doubt but they

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would have got on wonderfully. They were just like enough, just different enough. The souls of both were built on a solid structure of honour. Both—to use a word much degenerate in meaning since the days of my youth—were ladies. Both had enormous capacities for friendship with women. And the good-humoured candour of Constance would be a foil for Mother's peppery wit. As it was—well, Mother boasted that her set in Cohasset had never known divorce or scandal. If ever life opened again for me, I must come to Constance across events beyond comprehension of Mother's circle. And still I had faith that Constance would overcome all this—because she was Constance. At the end of these meditations I would pull myself up and realize that I had been dreaming, as a prisoner for life dreams of mountains and seas and green fields.

As the camp boomed, so did the *Courier*. By September, circulation had grown beyond the capacity of the flywheel and the two boys who furnished its motive power. At this juncture the Tecumseh mine, having struck it very rich, brought up from Denver a new boiler of increased capacity. Marcus bought the old boiler, installed it; splashed across his front page an announcement of "the first modern steam printing plant in the crown of the Continent." We were publishing six pages on Wednesdays and Sundays now; and our job-printing department, in spite of the increase in power, ran two weeks behind its orders. The first snow seemed to remind Marcus of the holiday season; then and there he conceived his grand sixteen-page New Year's Edition, with paid and illustrated "write-ups" of prominent citizens, and a price of twenty-five cents a copy. This plan, which absorbed for a week most of his splendid energies, soared beyond the resources of our camp; it required drawings, engravings, improved paper stock. Just before the big snow, Marcus wrote a week's editorials in advance, packed his carpet-bag, and took the stage to Denver, leaving me cocked up on the dizzy eminence of the editorial chair. As we parted, I was on the verge of asking him to visit

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instance; but I choked back the words from very shyness and necessity of guarding my soul. And after—what good would it do?

There followed a period of hard work and trying but interesting responsibility. Marcus intended to be gone only a week; but the big snow came, blocking the passes. It was ten days, in fact, before he appeared at the office without the grace of warning by telegraph, walked in upon me, the icicles hanging from his moustache. With scarcely a word of greeting or of news, he plunged into the business of supervising the night's work. When the printers had an hour's copy ready, he said:

"Get on your coat and come over to Huffaker's—the private room. I've got a heap of things to spill about that Denver business; and I don't want to tell 'em here. When I get an imprimatur for this printing concern, it's going to carry a great little device of a pair of cocked ears." We plodded over to Huffaker's, silent perforce in the face of an arctic wind. He took off his buffalo-coat, warmed his hands at the red-hot stove, before he began abruptly:

"What I want to talk to you about isn't business. It's your girl."

"Is she—is she well?" I asked.

"Well and reasonably happy, I guess," replied Marcus. "Now you sit down and keep your shirt on. I've got a lot to tell you. And I can't tell it newspaper-fashion, the whole story in the head. If you get to interrupting, it would be just like your meanness to fly off the handle and quit." He came over from the stove, sat down at the table opposite me, turned on me a look more nearly tender than ever I had seen in his face. But his first words seemed remote from the subject.

"You remember Mike the detective?"

"Yes."

Marcus nodded.

"Well, he's no common detective. Fancy operative, and all that. When Mr. Taylor hired him, he had to sign a year's contract. Everything was rounded up long before anybody

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expected. And there was Mike, eating his head off. So Mr. Taylor lent me Mike. Little testimonial of esteem for my work in stabilizing finance in this camp.

"I set him to looking up this Martin Deane——"

Marcus must have caught my expression, for he threw out his right hand in an impatient gesture of deprecation.

"Don't get any wrong notions," he said. "I ain't an officer of the law. What Martin Deane did after he fumigated this camp of himself is no business of mine. I wouldn't have handed him over if I'd caught him red-handed in murder. It was the past I was pryin' into. For satisfaction of my own curiosity. And your peace of mind, boy.

"How Mike went at it, I haven't asked. But he has a special wire running down to every circle of crooks in the West. He found that Deane came to Wyoming something more than a year ago. Mike located the town. Looked up his doings there. Since Deane, alias Maxwell, left here, he's been hanging round various camps in range of Denver. He's been telling Mrs. Deane, just as I told you, that he shouldn't go East with her for the present, because it isn't safe for them to be seen together. Hasn't occurred to you, has it, that they might travel separately and just meet somewhere? It has occurred to Mrs. Deane—I guess—but I suspect she's been fooling herself. Anyhow, I was stringing you because I wanted him right here in the West. And he was stringing her because he wasn't alone in his wanderings. He had company. You know Mrs. Deane has gone to work, don't you?"

I nodded.

"Don't know, I suppose, that it's because he wrote and got out of her the last cent she had. Now unclench those fists and wipe that expression off your face like a little gentleman, if you want me to go on. I don't think he'd have done it once. Away back in Providence—he's been looked up there, too—when he was only three-quarters crooked. But this man's West makes the good better and the bad worse, in my opinion. And does it sudden. Crooks always have queer spots of virtue in them, too. The marrying crook's common. Like any other

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specimen of that species, he wants what he wants so hard that he doesn't care how he gets it. But he has a whim for sanctifying his intentions on womenfolks with holy matrimony. And, like most men, he's capable of fancying two women at one and the same time. This Martin Deane, for example. He meets Mrs. Deane sudden, up here. Beside what he's been accustomed to in the past few months, she's like a seraph to a sow. So——"

"Marcus," I burst out, "for God's sake, get to the point!"

"This is the point, all down on paper," said Marcus, reaching for the inside pocket of his coat. "Mike found 'em last month. He's been working since to identify the signatures. And they're authentic." He spread out two documents on the table.

An order of divorce. Martin Deane of Wyoming from Constance Deane of Rhode Island. Cause, desertion. Dated last February. A marriage certificate. Martin Deane of Wyoming to Lucy Baldwyn of Wyoming. Dated two days later——

"Don't let your emotions get away with you until I have told you the rest," said Marcus. I gripped myself, and listened.

"Lu Baldwyn, alias Hattie Hart, alias Idaho Lu," said Marcus. "She supplied provender for their happy young family after he blew in the money he brought from the East. They quarrelled finally because he wasn't making any money for her. He came up here and made it, all right. After we ran him out, she got over her mad and came to him in Denver and took possession. Unless you want to hear some pretty rotten stuff, I can dispense with the rest of that.

"The divorce is right and it isn't right. There's other camps in this West that need a clean-up. That"—he pointed at the date-line on the papers—"is one of them. No lawyer is needed to see that this divorce won't hold water if the other party wants to fight. He hadn't lived long enough in Wyoming to establish a legal residence. The court—on the Judge Cowan pattern, only worse, I guess—has delicately refrained from

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inquiring into that. Other party wasn't notified either. If I was a young man with any intention of marrying a lady in that fix, I'd wait until she got divorced proper and legal on her own account. Mrs. Deane says——"

"You've seen her?"

"Yes. Found an afternoon off to call. Me and Mike, and afterward me alone. She took it hard at first. You know why. Guess before we were finished talking it over, she told me everything she's told you—barring some of the trimmings. But the upshot is—she's through. She's plumb sick and tired of this Martin Deane at last. Wouldn't have the spirit of a squashed tar baby if she wasn't."

I rose.

"I'm going to Denver!" I said.

"All right, give you a vacation if you want it," responded Marcus with a beaming smile. "Only if I were you, on the way to Denver I'd glance for a moment into the ladies' parlour of this hotel. It's fixed with Jim Huffaker that you aren't to be disturbed if you want to loaf and linger there a little while."

I flew down the corridor. Constance rose from the sofa; faced me. But as I sprang toward her, my arms outstretched, she stopped me with an uplifted hand.

"Robert," she said—and her syllables dropped like honey—"I haven't waited for you. I wanted to come to you—because you've been brave and because it happened here—and because you've suffered so much for me—and because I couldn't wait—and now, Robert, my lover—if you want me—come the rest of the way——"

THE END

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